

Lev Tolkunov

# How the USSR SUPREME SOVIET Functions



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# How the USSR SUPREME SOVIET Functions



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**КАК РАБОТАЕТ ВЕРХОВНЫЙ СОВЕТ СССР**

**на английском языке**

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## Power to the Soviets!

The name of our state sounds differently in different languages—l'Union Soviétique, la Unión Soviética, the Soviet Union. But the root word "Soviet" is invariably present. This word, a derivative from the Russian word "Sovet", is now part of the international political vocabulary. And it reflects the essence of state power in the USSR.

Article 2 of the USSR Constitution reads:

"All power in the USSR belongs to the people. The people exercise state power through Soviets of People's Deputies, which constitute the political foundation of the USSR. All other state bodies are under the control of, and accountable to, the Soviets of People's Deputies."

The term "Soviets" in its present political meaning emerged 12 years before the 1917 Socialist Revolution in the city of Ivanovo-Voznesensk,<sup>1</sup> the "Russian Manchester", as Russia's largest textile industry centre was called at that time. At the end of May 1905, during the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907, thousands of striking textile workers gathered on the bank of the Talka River to elect the first ever Soviet (Council) of Workers' Deputies, which took over the running of the city. The workers' deputies

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<sup>1</sup> Now Ivanovo (population 500,000), the centre of the Ivanovo Region in the Russian Federation (RSFSR).

numbering 152 (129 men and 23 women) were responsible for the distribution of food and the maintenance of public order. Workers' control was introduced at industrial enterprises under their leadership. The Soviet enjoyed such high prestige that even the tsarist governor had to ask for the deputies' consent to have an announcement printed at the local printshop, for example.

The Ivanovo-Voznesensk Soviet functioned for only 70 days—the revolution was suppressed by tsarism. However, the principles it had proclaimed triumphed throughout the country shortly afterwards.

Later, Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Russian Communists and founder of the Soviet state, made this observation in assessing the role of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Soviet: "Had not the popular creative spirit of the Russian revolution, which had gone through the great experience of the year 1905, given rise to the Soviets as early as February 1917, they could not under any circumstances have assumed power in October,<sup>1</sup> because success depended entirely upon the existence of available organisational forms of a movement embracing millions. The Soviets were the available form..."

## **The Development of the Soviets as Reflected in the Country's Four Constitutions**

After the 1917 Socialist Revolution a fundamentally new type of state emerged in Russia—the socialist state of workers and peasants. Its declared aim

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<sup>1</sup> The revolution began on October 25, 1917, according to the Julian calendar used in Russia at that time, which corresponds to November 7 according to the commonly accepted calendar which Russia adopted in 1918.

was to build socialism and communism, a society in which there would be no exploitation of man by man and whose foreign-policy principle would be peace. The state was called the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR). The first Soviet Constitution adopted in 1918 stated: "Russia is hereby proclaimed a Republic of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies." It introduced direct elections to rural and city Soviets and multi-tier elections to higher government bodies. The workers enjoyed a number of advantages in the matter of representational quota as compared with the peasantry. "They were embodied in the Constitution *after* they were already in actual practice," Lenin pointed out. "The organisation of the proletariat proceeded much more rapidly than the organisation of the peasants, which fact made the workers the bulwark of the revolution and gave them a virtual advantage. The next task is gradually to pass from these advantages to their equalisation."

In the cities the Soviets were formed on the basis of one deputy per every 1,000 of the population, and in rural areas—one deputy for every 100 inhabitants. The supreme body of state authority was the All-Russia Congress of Soviets. It was formed of representatives of the city Soviets on the basis of one delegate per 25,000 voters and of the rural Soviets on the basis of one delegate per 125,000 voters. Such representational quotas are explained by the fact that Russia was chiefly a peasant country at that time. For instance, in 1922 peasants accounted for about 76 per cent of the population while factory workers and office employees, for only 14.8 per cent.

Some Western historians refer to the unequal electoral rights in those days as "proof" of the limited character of Soviet democracy in the initial phase of its development. Indeed, the first Soviet Constitution

denied voting rights to those who used hired labour, to private traders and former policemen. They made up not more than a few per cent of the total population. As Party and government leaders at that time had repeatedly stressed, it was a temporary measure, one that had to be taken in order to defend the people's gains from the intrigues of the counter-revolutionary forces supported from outside. It was part of an acute class struggle.

At the same time the Soviet state did all it could to draw the broad mass of the working people into running the country. This was done through the central and local government bodies—the Soviets. In the Russian Federation alone, in the first decade following the 1917 Revolution 19 million people were elected delegates to the Congresses of Soviets or members of their Executive Committees.

In the first years after the 1917 Revolution several other independent Soviet Republics, besides the Russian Federation, emerged in what used to be the Russian Empire. Those were the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Transcaucasian Federation consisting of the Republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. Each had its own Constitution. The young Soviet Republics, which had identical social, economic and political systems and shared the same ideology and ultimate objectives, established close fraternal relations with one another. During the Civil War and foreign military intervention against the Soviet Republics (1918-1920) they united their efforts in resisting the common enemy and later concluded an economic and diplomatic alliance. In the course of their joint revolutionary struggle the peoples of those Soviet Republics came to realize the need of setting up an even closer association. Historically it was inevitable that the further development of relations among the fraternal republics should result in their

voluntary association in a single federal socialist state on the basis of complete equality. This happened in late 1922. The First Congress of Soviets of the USSR opened in Moscow on December 30 of that year. It was attended by 2,215 delegates from the Soviet Republics. They unanimously endorsed the Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR).

The Second Congress of Soviets of the USSR (1924) adopted the first *all-Union* Constitution. It affirmed the formation of the USSR through the voluntary association of the equal republics and their right freely to secede from the federation. The supreme bodies of state authority were also set up. They were the Congress of Soviets of the USSR, the Central Executive Committee of the USSR and its Presidium. Each of the Soviet Republics had similar supreme bodies of state authority. Congresses were convened once a year and since 1927—once every two years.

The Central Executive Committee of the USSR was the highest body of state authority between the Congresses of Soviets. It consisted of two equal chambers—the Union Soviet and the Soviet of Nationalities. The latter represented all the republics inhabited by the non-Russian nationalities and other national-state formations on the principles of equality.

The USSR Central Executive Committee issued decrees (laws), decisions, and instructions, formed the government—the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, introduced changes in its composition when necessary, and supervised the work of all other state bodies. Between its sessions its Presidium exercised the functions of the highest body of legislative, executive and administrative authority.

The Presidium was accountable to the Central Executive Committee in all its work.

That government structure existed till 1936. Over that period of nearly 15 years the country was industrialised, its agriculture was organised along collective lines, and socialist ownership of the means of production in the form of state property (belonging to all the people) and collective farm-and-cooperative property was established in the main. By 1937 the socialist sector of the economy accounted for 99.8 per cent of industrial output and 98.5 per cent of farm produce. An "equalisation" of the working class and farmers took place: factory and office workers already made up about half of the population. The exploiter classes fully disappeared from the political scene. All those changes were reflected in the third Soviet Constitution adopted by the 8th Congress of Soviets of the USSR on December 5, 1936, following a countrywide discussion. The Constitution reaffirmed the victory of socialism in the USSR as a result of the elimination of the capitalist economic system and the abolition of private ownership of the means and implements of production as well as the exploitation of man by man. It abolished all previous restrictions concerning electoral rights and introduced universal, equal, and direct suffrage by secret ballot. All government bodies were reorganised into a uniform system of the Soviets of Working People's Deputies at all levels—from the rural and city Soviets to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR—elected directly by the population.

Four decades later, on October 7, 1977, the USSR Supreme Soviet adopted another Constitution, which is now in force. Why was this necessary?

In a general form the answer is this: Soviet socialist society is a dynamic organism which is constantly perfecting itself. In the four decades that had passed



since the previous Constitution was adopted Soviet society had undergone further changes. They were so profound that it became necessary to sum them up in the country's Fundamental Law.

The constitution of a country should reflect the life of that country. This is natural and also vital for the development of the country. That is why the milestones in the development of the Soviet Union have been consolidated in the respective Constitution.

Take, for instance, the US Constitution. It has never been revised as a whole. Yet life itself had compelled the lawmakers to add amendments to it. And the Constitution is formulated in such general terms that American courts have to interpret it in each particular case. As for the Soviet Constitution, it is up-to-date and put in a clear-cut form that is free from ambiguities.

The changes consisted of the following. First, instead of the foundation of a socialist economy laid in the 1930s the Soviet Union in the mid-1970s had an economy, both in town and the countryside, which was quite developed, well-equipped technically and based on the undisputed domination of socialist ownership. For instance, in 1977 the Soviet Union could produce in less than a month an equivalent of the gross national product for the whole of 1936. Over the same period the fixed assets-to-labour ratio in the spheres of material production increased 14 times, power consumption per worker in industry went up nearly 8 times, and in agriculture, more than 15 times.

Second, all the classes and social groups in the USSR had drawn much closer to one another, with the working class retaining its leading role. This development was extremely important. Soviet society had become much more homogeneous. Today it consists of two friendly classes, the workers (61.6 per

cent of the population) and the cooperative farmers (12.4 per cent), as well as the working intelligentsia (26 per cent).

The differences between physical and mental work, between the working conditions in town and the countryside are being gradually eliminated. A new historical community, the Soviet people, has been formed on the basis of the common objectives and ideals of more than a hundred nations and ethnic groups inhabiting the Soviet Union.

Third, Soviet society had made a tremendous stride forward in the field of culture. The Soviet Union had long since become a land of universal literacy. Two-thirds of the gainfully employed population had either a secondary or higher education; the figure for 1936 was less than 8 per cent. Over the same period the number of workers with a specialised secondary or higher education had increased 34 times in industry and 47 times in agriculture.

And lastly, in the 1937-1977 period considerable progress was made in the development of Soviet democracy, of socialist self-government by the people. Today nearly every adult in one way or another takes part in running the affairs of state and society through the Soviets (2.3 million deputies plus more than 30 million voluntary helpers), trade unions (over 137 million members), the Young Communist League (about 42 million), and other public organisations.

In view of all those radical changes the Communist Party of the Soviet Union stated that Soviet society had reached a new historical frontier marking the beginning of the period of developed socialism. It was an extremely important theoretical and practical conclusion. The preamble to the new Constitution points out that "the aims of the dictatorship of the proletariat having been fulfilled, the Soviet state has

become a state of the whole people". The Constitution also affirms the single system of state authority in the USSR in the form of the Soviets of People's Deputies which make up the basis of the socialist self-government by the people.

Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, said at the 27th Party Congress held in February-March, 1986: "The Soviets of People's Deputies, born of the revolutionary creativity of the working people, have stood the test of time, displaying their viability and vast potentialities in securing full power for the people, in uniting and mobilising the masses. The very logic of the development of socialist democracy points to the urgent necessity of making maximum use of these potentialities of Soviet representative bodies."

## **The Soviet Federation**

It is usually thought that every country has only one constitution. However, it is not so in the case of the USSR. Besides the all-Union Constitution it has another 35 Constitutions.

The reason is that the Soviet Union is a federal state. It consists of 15 Union Republics which include 20 Autonomous Republics, 8 Autonomous Regions and 10 Autonomous Areas. All the Republics, both the Union and Autonomous ones, have Constitutions of their own.

It is often said in the West that the Soviet Federation is too centralised and leaves no room for the autonomy of the republics it incorporates. In fact, however, as is made clear by Article 73 of the USSR Constitution and the corresponding articles of the Constitutions of the Union and Autonomous

Republics, the federation's "centralism" concerns only such matters of state activity that require national leadership which at the same time takes into account the interests of each republic.

It is only natural that the Soviet Republics, when they merged to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR), should voluntarily cede part of their sovereign rights to the federation. Otherwise the USSR simply could not exist as an integral, federal state. In this connection the highest federal bodies of state authority and administration in the Soviet Union exercise the following functions:

- 1) the admission of new republics to the USSR; endorsement of the formation of new autonomous republics and autonomous regions within Union Republics;

- 2) determination of the state boundaries of the USSR and approval of changes in the boundaries between Union Republics;

- 3) establishment of the general principles for the organisation and functioning of republican and local bodies of state authority and administration; the ensurance of uniformity of legislative norms throughout the USSR;

- 4) pursuance of a uniform social and economic policy; direction of the country's economy; determination of the main lines of scientific and technological progress and the general measures for rational exploitation and conservation of natural resources; the drafting and approval of state plans for the economic and social development of the USSR, and of the country's budget; management of a single monetary and credit system;

- 5) consideration of questions of war and peace, defence of the sovereignty of the USSR and safeguarding of its borders and territory, and organisation of the country's defence; direction of its Armed Forces;

6) ensuring of state security;

7) representation of the USSR in international relations; establishment of the general procedure for, and coordination of, the relations of Union Republics with other states and with international organisations; conduct of foreign trade and other forms of external economic activity on the basis of state monopoly;

8) control over the observance of the USSR Constitution throughout the country.

Each republic exercises full state authority in deciding on all other matters on its territory.

The USSR, with an area of 22.4 million square kilometres, has a population of 278.7 million (1986). Its capital, Moscow, has a population of 8.6 million.

The USSR consists of the following Union Republics: the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (capital city Moscow; area 17,075,400 square kilometres; population 143,100,000); the Ukrainian SSR (capital Kiev; area 603,700 square kilometres; population 50,800,000); the Byelorussian SSR (capital Minsk; area 207,600 square kilometres; population 9,900,000); the Uzbek SSR (capital Tashkent; area 447,400 square kilometres; population 18,000,000); the Kazakh SSR (capital Alma Ata; area 2,717,300 square kilometres; population 15,900,000); the Georgian SSR (capital Tbilisi; area 69,700 square kilometres; population 5,200,000); the Azerbaijan SSR (capital Baku; area 86,600 square kilometres; population 6,600,000); the Lithuanian SSR (capital Vilnius; area 65,200 square kilometres; population 3,600,000); the Moldavian SSR (capital Kishinev; area 33,700 square kilometres; population 4,100,000); the Latvian SSR (capital Riga; area 63,700 square kilometres; population 2,600,000); the Kirghiz SSR (capital Frunze; area 198,500 square kilometres; population 4,000,000); the Tajik SSR (capital Dushambe;

area 143,100 square kilometres; population 4,500,000); the Armenian SSR (capital Yerevan; area 29,800 square kilometres; population 3,300,000); the Turkmen SSR (capital Ashkhabad; area 488,100 square kilometres; population 3,200,000); and the Estonian SSR (capital Tallinn; area 45,100 square kilometres; population 1,500,000).

Each Union Republic, besides its own Constitution, has its own flag and emblem as a sovereign state, its own legislation and judicial, criminal, civil and proceedings codes. They reflect both the general laws governing the development of Soviet democracy and local conditions. Each republic has wide powers in matters relating to the maintenance of public order, protection of citizens' rights and the granting of amnesty and pardon. Each Union Republic has its own citizenship and has the right to grant its citizenship and, consequently, citizenship of the USSR since "every citizen of a Union Republic is a citizen of the USSR" (Article 33 of the USSR Constitution).

The territory of a Union Republic may not be altered without its consent. The boundaries between Union Republics may be altered only by mutual agreement of the republics concerned. All-Union bodies have no right to change the boundaries of a republic if the latter objects to it.

All Union Republics independently manage their industrial, agricultural, and trade establishments. They also direct the work of local housing and public utility services, transport and communication facilities, and decide all matters concerning education, health protection, social security, etc. on their territory.

The Union Republics also decide matters relating to their administrative and territorial structure. This makes it possible more fully to take into account local conditions such as the composition of the popu-

lation, the level of economic development, geographic features, and so on. For instance, rapid economic growth in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kirghizia led to the formation a short while ago of new administrative and territorial units there—regions.

The state sovereignty of a republic is exercised by its Supreme Soviet (Parliament). It adopts laws, forms the republic's government and Supreme Court and directs the work of all local bodies of state authority and administration.

Finally, the most important guarantee of the sovereignty of each Union Republic is its right freely to secede from the federation, a right recorded in the USSR Constitution and in its own Constitution. The question of seceding from the USSR can be decided only by the Republic itself in accordance with the will of its people.

At the same time, as a member of the federation, each Union Republic has certain rights with regard to it. These include, for instance, the right to demand the convening of an emergency session of the USSR Supreme Soviet or the holding of a countrywide referendum and the right to initiate legislation.

Article 166 of the USSR Constitution points out that "laws of the USSR and decisions and other acts of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR shall be published in the languages of the Union Republics over the signatures of the Chairman and Secretary of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR". This reflects yet another specific feature of the Soviet federation—the absence of an official state language. Each Union Republic (just as the other national formations in the Soviet Union) uses its own language in any sphere of political, state, production, social, scientific or cultural activities.

Article 36 of the USSR Constitution, which proclaims the equal rights of citizens of the USSR of



different races and nationalities, notes that exercise of these rights is ensured, among other things, "by the possibility to use their native language and the languages of other peoples of the USSR". In other words, not only government bodies and public organisations but all citizens of the Union Republics have the right and the practical possibility to use their native languages in all spheres of activity. For instance, they can attend schools at all levels, including institutions of higher learning, where instruction is in their native languages. Graduation diplomas from any school, regardless of the language of instruction, are valid throughout the country.

Citizens of the USSR can use their native language in appealing to any government body, including courts, since judicial proceedings in each republic are conducted in the local language or in the language spoken by the majority of the population. If a person participating in court proceedings does not know this language, he has the right to familiarise himself with the materials in the case and take part in the proceedings through an interpreter and the right to address the court in his or her own language. Under Soviet law, the services of an interpreter are paid for by the court and not by the citizens concerned.

At the same time the Russian language is used in the Soviet Union as a means of communication among different nationalities. This came about naturally, in the course of the country's development. That is why in all federal bodies and central government offices of the USSR sessions and other meetings are conducted either in Russian or in any of the other languages spoken in the USSR; in the latter case the services of a Russian interpreter are employed. The Russian language is voluntarily studied by millions of people, and millions of people speak it fluently in all the Union Republics. Consequently, there is no

language problem for a Soviet person of any nationality that would prevent him from taking part in political or public activities outside his own republic.

In the 1979 National Census 153.5 million people (the country's population stood at 262.4 million) put down Russian as their native language. That included 137.2 million Russians and 16.3 million people of other nationalities. Another 61.3 million said that they spoke Russian fluently and regarded it as their second language.

These are the main features of the Union Republics as sovereign states. In some of these republics, besides the nationality that forms the majority of the population there are also people of other nationalities and ethnic groups living in well-defined areas and having their own languages, economic development patterns and ways of life and culture. All of them enjoy autonomy, that is, they exercise state power on their territory and have extensive rights of self-government (for example, the right to set up their own government bodies, courts, administrative bodies, schools and social, political, cultural and educational centres). The autonomous state formations function under the general direction of the Union Republics in which they are situated, but their rights are guaranteed not only by the latter but also by the USSR as a whole.

There are also other forms of national statehood in the USSR. One of them is the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). It is a Soviet socialist state which is a constituent part of a Union Republic and enjoys limited sovereignty. An Autonomous Republic has its own Constitution, parliament (the Supreme Soviet), government and Supreme Court. It has the right to enact laws conforming to the legislation of the Union Republic of which it is a part

with the specific features of the local nationality being taken into account.

Each Autonomous Republic sends 11 elected representatives to the Soviet of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet. As for the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic, its representation there depends on the size of the republic's population. In this connection, it is noteworthy that although the total population of the Autonomous Republics is a little over eight per cent of the country's overall figure, they have 220 deputies in the Soviet of Nationalities, that is, more than 29 per cent of the total.

Another form of national autonomy is the Autonomous Region. An Autonomous Region is a territorial formation which is a constituent part of a Union Republic and which has a more or less homogeneous population with its own specific way of life. It enjoys administrative self-government in internal affairs and has its own government and administrative bodies: the Regional Soviet of People's Deputies and its Executive Committee, various sections and departments. Under the Constitutions of the Union Republics, the Soviet of People's Deputies of each Autonomous Region drafts and submits for approval to the Republic's Supreme Soviet the law on its autonomy which takes into account the sum total of its specific ethnic features. The territory of an Autonomous Region cannot be changed without its consent. Each Autonomous Region establishes its administrative and territorial division, and each has five elected representatives in the Soviet of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Each is also represented in the Supreme Soviet of its Union Republic.

A third form of Soviet national autonomy is the Autonomous Area, a national-state formation of small ethnic groups within a territory or region,

which enjoys administrative self-government in internal affairs. Each Area has its own government and administrative bodies: the Area Soviet of People's Deputies and its Executive Committee. Each Autonomous Area has one representative in the Soviet of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

## **Soviets of People's Deputies**

"An authority open to all"—that was how Lenin defined the Soviets. Lenin also summarised and formulated the main principles of their everyday activities: democratic centralism, free, collective and businesslike discussion and decision-making, publicity, informing the population of their work, regular reporting back to the voters and strict control over the implementation of adopted decisions. "Soviet power," Lenin said, "is so organised as to bring the working people close to the machinery of government."

The Soviets of People's Deputies constitute a whole system of representative bodies built on common principles and called upon to exercise uniform state authority in the country. In keeping with the federal structure of the Soviet state, this system includes the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Supreme Soviets of the 15 Union Republics and the Supreme Soviets of the 20 Autonomous Republics as well as more than 52,000 local Soviets, including 137 territorial and regional Soviets, 10 area Soviets, about 6,000 district and city Soviets, and 46,000 rural and settlement Soviets. All told, they have more than 2.3 million elected members.

In the Soviet political system local government bodies are not set against the higher ones. Each higher Soviet not only verifies the legality of the

actions taken by a local one, but also directs its activities and is responsible for its work. A combination of overall centralised leadership and day-to-day self-government in the localities makes it possible to organise the country's entire political, economic and cultural activities on uniform principles and to harmonise local and national interests.

The country's highest body of state authority is the USSR Supreme Soviet. It enacts laws, forms the USSR Government, and approves the state plans for the country's economic, social and cultural development. It also has unlimited powers in checking on the work of any state body, including the USSR Council of Ministers. The highest bodies of authority in the Union and Autonomous Republics are their own Supreme Soviets.

For their part, the local Soviets—those functioning in settlements, villages, districts, cities, regions, territories, autonomous areas and regions—ensure the observance of laws, decide questions relating to land use, organise the work of schools and other educational institutions, provide free medical service to the population, grant and pay state pensions, maintain public order and protect state and personal property.

“If someone is allowed to say, ‘This is none of my business’, this approach is certainly unacceptable to the Soviets. Housing and education, public health and consumer goods, trade and services, public transport and the protection of nature are principal concerns of the Soviets.” This statement from the Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress provides a key to understanding the role of the local Soviets in the entire activities of Soviet society, their responsibility for everything that takes place on their territories.

Concerning the responsibility and autonomy of the

local Soviets, I should like to emphasise that in the USSR there is no division of the bodies of authority into those of government (whose members are officials appointed from above) and those of local self-government which run local affairs under the supervision of higher bodies, a division that is traditional for many Western countries. That is why there are neither governors nor prefects in the Soviet state system, and there is no such concept as "administrative supervision" over local self-government bodies. All local executive bodies are elected by the Soviets themselves and are fully accountable to them.

Unlike the Western municipalities, local self-government bodies in the USSR have wide powers in the economic sphere. For instance, all local industrial enterprises are directly subordinate to them. Besides, the Soviets can intervene in the operation of enterprises and organisations located on their territories but subordinated to the USSR ministries or the ministries of Union Republics.

Here is an example. In the early 1980s the Soviet of Krivoi Rog (a city in the Ukraine) vetoed the construction of what would be the world's biggest blast furnace there. The Soviet demanded that the project be moved to a different site. A commission set up by the city Soviet to study the project worked out by the USSR Ministry of the Iron-and-Steel Industry had concluded that it would be inexpedient to build the giant blast furnace in that area because, first, it might increase air pollution in nearby residential districts and, second, it would make it impossible to expand the grounds and increase the capacity of the integrated steel works later on. So the Soviet asked the Ministry to build the blast furnace outside city limits. That meant that the Ministry would have to move a settlement with 30,000 residents to another place and considerably increase the amount of auxiliary work.

All this would involve additional expenditure. And yet the Ministry had to comply with the decision of the local authorities.

At the same time, as was noted at the 27th Congress of the CPSU, local government bodies still fail to show a sufficiently businesslike approach and initiative in exercising their powers, especially by present-day standards, in view of the enormously complex tasks faced by Soviet society today. The country is carrying out a large-scale programme for the intensification of social and economic development through speeding up scientific and technological progress and improving management and the entire economic mechanism. The solution of this problem is inseparably linked with the further perfection of socialist democracy and socialist self-government.

Addressing the Plenary Meeting of the CPSU Central Committee in April 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev said: "It is no less important to increase the responsibility of republican and local bodies for the supervision of economic, social, and cultural work and for meeting the needs of working people. But to do this, it is of course necessary further to extend the rights of local bodies, to enhance their initiative and interest in the development of production, in the rational utilisation of resources and the smooth functioning of all spheres of services to the population."

There are no professional politicians or parliamentarians in the USSR. This is one of the most important features of the Soviet political system. Members of the Soviets at all levels exercise their powers without pay while continuing their regular employment at factories or offices. This arrangement enables them to be constantly in the midst of their voters, to share many interests with them and to know better what their needs and requirements are. Voters, on the other hand, can always check on the work of their



representatives, put forward proposals and make known their wishes.

Another characteristic feature of the Soviet political system is regular election of new representatives to government bodies, the promotion of new capable people to leadership posts. As a rule, new people make up about half of the deputies in every election. More than 20 million persons have acquired experience in running the affairs of state in the Soviets over the past two decades alone.

The Law on the Status of Deputies adopted in 1972 says that their main duty is always to keep in touch with their voters and with work collectives that nominated them for office. Every deputy is responsible and accountable to them.

Voters' mandates are also of major importance. They are collective instructions given to deputies at election meetings. The mandates concern questions of both domestic and foreign policies and such concrete matters as the construction of new underground railway lines, hospitals, schools, stadiums, etc. Thus, government bodies in the USSR work on programmes based on instructions "from below" and not on election promises.

For instance, in the last elections to local Soviets held in February 1985, voters in the Siberian city of Omsk drew up a list of instructions: they wanted to have their airfield moved farther away from the growing city, to have a new building put up for the musical theatre, and to have parking lots set aside for invalids' cars in every block. The city Soviet is now carrying out these instructions. All told, the local Soviets accepted more than 800,000 mandates during the last elections. As a result, a large number of schools, medical and preschool child-care centres, community centres, cinemas, shops, and services establishments are being built in the country. Much is

also being done to further improve services in populated centres, including the building and repairing of roads.

Under the law deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR or of Union Republics must report to their constituents on their work in the Soviets and on what is being done to carry out their instructions at least once a year, and deputies to local Soviets—at least twice a year. This reporting is far from being a sheer formality. When a deputy meets his constituents, the latter may point out shortcomings and put forward proposals concerning some aspects of his work, and express wishes to which he is obliged to respond. If a deputy neglects his duties, fails to carry out the mandates of his constituents, to respond to their requests or complaints, they have the right to recall him before his term of office expires.

The significance of such action was pointed out by Lenin, who wrote in 1917: “No elective institution or representative assembly can be regarded as being truly democratic and really representative of the people’s will unless the electors’ right to recall those elected is accepted and exercised.”

This idea is affirmed in Soviet legislation. Article 107 of the USSR Constitution says: “Deputies who have not justified the confidence of their constituents may be recalled at any time by decision of a majority of the electors in accordance with the procedure established by law.”

Thus, in the USSR the responsibility of the deputies to the Soviets to their constituents is not a matter of formality. It is the main principle of the work of government bodies at all levels.

There is yet another aspect to the work of the Soviets of People’s Deputies that makes it “an authority open to all”, apart from the democratic principles of their formation and activities. In their day-to-day work they constantly and directly rely on

broad sections of citizens who are not deputies. For instance, they have the support of numerous public bodies such as street, block, house, and district committees and various councils at cultural, educational, medical and other institutions. The Soviets are also closely linked with such grass-roots organisations as the trade unions, the Young Communist League, cooperative societies and scientific, technological and other organisations.

What will be the main trends of development of the USSR system of government in the immediate years ahead and in the more distant future? This is spelled out in detail in the new edition of the Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union adopted by the 27th Congress of the CPSU in March 1986:

“It is a matter of key importance for the Party’s policy to develop and strengthen the Soviet socialist state and increasingly reveal its democratic nature as a state of the whole people and its creative and constructive role.

“The CPSU makes constant efforts to improve the work of the Soviets of People’s Deputies—the political foundation of the USSR, the main element in socialist self-government by the people. The Party attaches great significance to perfecting the forms of the people’s representation, to developing the democratic principles of the Soviet electoral system and to ensuring free, comprehensive discussion of the candidates’ personal and professional qualities so that the most capable and respected representatives of the working class, collective-farm peasantry and the people’s intelligentsia of all the nations and nationalities of the country are elected to the Soviets. In order to improve the work of the Soviets and infuse fresh blood into them, in order that more millions of people will go through the school of

running the state, the composition of deputies to the Soviets will be systematically renewed at elections.

“The CPSU makes a constant effort to facilitate the work of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Supreme Soviets of the Union Republics of consistently perfecting legislation, effectively resolving the key problems of home and foreign policy within their sphere of responsibilities, exercising vigorous guidance over the Soviets of People’s Deputies and checking on the work done by the agencies under them. The role and responsibility of local Soviets in ensuring the comprehensive economic and social development of their respective regions, in implementing tasks of local significance and in coordinating and checking on the activities of organisations in their areas will continue to grow.”

## **The Supreme Soviet of the USSR**

What place does the Supreme Soviet of the USSR hold in the Soviet state system? What are its functions and powers? Answers to these questions can be found in the USSR Constitution and the activities of the Soviet parliament that take place in keeping with the Regulations of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. According to the Constitution, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR is the highest body of state authority in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Elected directly by the population, it is the highest representative body empowered to exercise the sovereignty of the entire Soviet people. It is the only body of state authority in the USSR directly representing the country’s entire population and expressing the interests of all of its nations and ethnic groups. It supervises the work of all state bodies accountable to it.

Under the Constitution the Supreme Soviet of the USSR is empowered to deal with all matters within the jurisdiction of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Supreme Soviet alone has the right to approve state plans for USSR economic and social development, the Budget of the USSR and reports on their execution, lay down the basic principles of USSR legislation, represent the USSR in international relations, conclude, ratify and denounce international treaties, decide all matters relating to war and peace, admit new republics to the USSR, endorse changes of boundaries between Union Republics and the formation of new Autonomous Republics and Autonomous Regions within the Union Republics.

And, of course, the Supreme Soviet alone has the right to introduce changes in the USSR Constitution, and any amendments to the Constitution must be approved by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the total number of deputies in each of its chambers.

All top federal bodies of authority and administration are elected, formed or appointed by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR alone. As a rule, at its first session following parliamentary elections it elects a Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, its standing body accountable to it in all its work and exercising the functions of the supreme body of state authority between sessions of the Supreme Soviet; forms the USSR government, i.e. the Council of Ministers of the USSR, and the Committee of People's Control which heads the country's system of control bodies; and elects the Supreme Court of the USSR, the highest judicial body of the Soviet state, and appoints the Procurator-General of the USSR who exercises supreme power of supervision over the strict observance of laws.

The adoption of all-Union laws is a most important

sphere of work of the Supreme Soviet. According to the Constitution, laws are enacted by the Supreme Soviet or by a nationwide vote (referendum) held by decision of the Supreme Soviet. The laws of the USSR are uniform and have the same force in all Union Republics. If there is a discrepancy between a Union Republic law and similar all-Union law, the latter prevails.

At the same time the Supreme Soviet ensures observance of the country's laws. It has unlimited powers in supervising the work of any state body, including the country's government. On the other hand, no other body of authority has the right to influence the Supreme Soviet in any way. For instance, the government has no right to ask for a vote of confidence in a bid to get the Supreme Soviet to pass a bill into law.

Thus, unlike the parliaments of many countries, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR exercises not only legislative functions. It combines them with executive and supervisory functions. This combination enables it consistently to express and carry out the will of the entire Soviet people in keeping with the requirements of the country's economic and social development.

In its activities the Supreme Soviet of the USSR proceeds from the principles and social tasks outlined by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The latter, as is stated in the Constitution, is the leading and guiding force of Soviet society, the nucleus of its political system. It is the Communist Party, as a rule, that initiates economic and social decisions aimed at further developing the country's productive forces, implementing more fully the principle of social justice in every sphere of social relations, raising living standards, perfecting socialist democracy, and enriching the content of human rights and freedoms. The CPSU pays such close attention to these problems

because first of all it is a ruling party. Its main objective is to build communist society based on social justice and the broadest possible self-government by the people, that is, on democracy (people's power).

So, how does the CPSU fulfill its leading role in relation to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the system of the Soviets of People's Deputies as a whole? The basic principle here was worked out in the first years of the Soviet state. In the second Party Programme adopted at the 8th Party Congress in 1919, which envisaged the construction of socialism as the first phase of communism, it is said that "the functions of Party bodies should not be mixed with those of state bodies which are the Soviets... The Party seeks to *direct* the work of the Soviets, not to replace them."

To begin with, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union neither adopts nor abrogates laws. This is a prerogative of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and of its counterparts in the Union Republics. The Party's leading role is chiefly expressed in working out the key political decisions which are then submitted to state bodies for consideration as recommendations. A case in point is the country's long-term (usually five-year) plans of social and economic development. The guidelines for such development adopted by Party Congresses are later taken as a basis for drawing up plans by the USSR government. These plans are studied by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and, having been approved by it, become law.

Within the Supreme Soviet, Communist Party decisions are also carried out strictly in conformity with the Constitution. They are implemented through agencies of the Supreme Soviet, through deputies, who are Communist Party members, first of all members of the CPSU Central Committee, and



through the entire Party group of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

The last-named includes all Communists elected deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the given convocation. For instance, the present Party group is formed of deputies elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on March 4, 1984, and includes 1,072 full members and candidate members of the CPSU. The general meetings of the Party group, usually held before sessions, discuss the most important items on the agenda and work out a consensus.

Before being submitted to the sessions of the Supreme Soviet these items are discussed at the Plenary Meetings of the Party Central Committee. This is a long-standing practice in the Soviet Union. For instance, government leaders report to members of the CPSU Central Committee on the draft state plans of the country's development and budget for the coming year. The drafts, after being endorsed in the main at a plenary meeting, are submitted for consideration by the Supreme Soviet in accordance with the procedure established by the Constitution. At the Supreme Soviet session they are further studied and discussed by deputies, both Communists and people who are not members of the Party. The drafts are amended and improved. And after they have been endorsed by a majority of deputies they come into force.

## **How Elections Are Held**

There are 1,500 deputies in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. They are elected for a term of five years on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. Every deputy assumes his duties when

elected by a majority of votes in the electoral district where he stands.

The Soviet electoral system is free from the kind of restrictions that are typical for Western countries. For instance, all voters residing in the given constituency either permanently or temporarily by election time are included in the voting lists. Nor are there any literacy qualifications. Indeed, the Soviet Union has long since become a land of universal literacy. According to UN data, it leads the world in the educational standards of the population. The USSR Constitution gives electoral rights to all citizens who have reached the age of 18 regardless of race, nationality, sex, religion, social origin, property status, and past activities. The only exceptions are persons who have been legally certified insane.

Nor are there any restrictions on the nominees regarding their social or property status, past activities, religious views, their position in society or sex. The only qualification is that of age. To be eligible for election to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR one must have reached the age of 21, and to be eligible for election to the Supreme Soviets of the Republics and to the local Soviets of People's Deputies one has to be at least 18 years old. Any attempt to prevent citizens from exercising their electoral rights is punishable by law. Vote-rigging is punished by a prison term of up to two years.

Elections to all Soviets are held in electoral districts, with each district electing one deputy. All electoral districts, with the exception of those which elect deputies to the Soviet of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, should have equal number of residents.

Another specific feature of elections in the Soviet Union is that a large number of citizens take part in conducting them. For instance, the registering of

nominees, vote-counting, control over the observance of election rules are carried out by electoral commissions consisting of representatives of public organisations and work collectives. Members of the commissions are elected by open ballot at general staff meetings at factories, offices, research institutes, schools, and army units.

For instance, the electoral commissions set up to conduct the last elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, held on March 4, 1984, consisted of more than two million members. They represented the staffs of factories, collective and state farms, Party, trade union, cooperative and youth organisations, unions of professional people and scientific and technical societies. Factory workers and collective farmers made up more than half of them (54 per cent), and women accounted for 48 per cent. Almost 56 per cent were not members of the Communist Party.

Now, let us look at the composition of the Central Electoral Commission formed for conducting those elections. It also consisted of representatives from various public organisations and work collectives. Among them were Academician Nikolai Basov, Lenin and Nobel Prize winner, pilot-cosmonaut Vladimir Dzhaniybekov and assemblyman Konstantinas Romualdas Kuzmauskas of Lithuania, to mention just a few—out of a total of 29 people representing all the fifteen Union Republics. The commission was headed by the well-known writer Georgi Markov. His deputy was Alexandra Biryukova, Secretary of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, now a Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee.

The Central Electoral Commission saw to it that the election campaign was held according to the relevant rules and regulations. It also considered complaints about actions by local electoral commissions and made final decisions on them, registered

deputies elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and summed up the election results.

The work of electoral commissions is given wide publicity. Their meetings are usually attended by representatives from various public organisations, and by newspaper, radio and television correspondents who have the right to familiarise themselves with the work of commissions at every stage, including the vote-counting and the announcement of the election returns.

All expenses involved in holding elections, including expenditures on the tours of nominees and their speeches on radio and television, are fully met by the state.

There is only one candidate for each seat in the Soviets. This fact has given rise to many false allegations outside the socialist world. It is often claimed that the USSR holds "elections without the right of choice".

The point is, however, that Soviet laws are far from limiting the number of nominees for each seat in any elective body. The Law on Elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and corresponding republican laws on elections to the local Soviets of People's Deputies oblige electoral commissions to register all nominees and to include them into ballot papers in alphabetical order.

In practice, however, people have developed a different form of choosing their representatives to elective bodies, a form which, in their view, is more effective. The point is that competition among candidates is held not only at the time of voting, but also much earlier and in several rounds in the course of the entire election campaign. Let us see how it works.

In accordance with the country's Constitution, no one has the right to announce his own candidacy. This right is vested in public organisations and the

general meetings of work collectives at factories and offices. At such meetings candidates may be nominated both on behalf of public organisations like the trade unions and by individuals. Naturally, they most often nominate candidates from their own midst, people whom they know well, who are public-spirited and whom they respect. In fact, this principle is widely used by trade unions in many countries in electing their leaders.

While the candidacies are discussed any person has unlimited opportunities for voicing his opinion, for challenging the candidacy and for proposing a candidate of his or her own choice. As a result of such discussion the general meeting of a work collective at a factory, a plant, a collective farm or an office chooses a candidate who is the most deserving in its view by a majority of votes. Such meetings also elect the "canvassers" of the nominees. The "canvassers" are supposed to acquaint other voters, who did not take part in the meeting, with the nominees, to describe their personal and professional qualities and to explain why the collectives and public organisations have nominated them for this or that government body.

The next round of the campaign comes with district election meetings. At such gatherings representatives from public organisations and work collectives in the corresponding constituency once again discuss all the nominees and, after a wide-ranging and open discussion, reach agreement on supporting a joint candidate. The latter's name is submitted to the electoral commission for registration. The remaining nominees either withdraw their candidacies themselves or this is done for them by the organisations and collectives that have nominated them.

Mikhail Kalinin, who was the head of the Soviet state from 1919 to 1946 first as Chairman of All-Russia Central Executive Committee and then of the

Central Executive Committee and of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, explained the significance of that procedure in the following way: "If in our country nominees in a number of places withdraw their names in favour of one candidate, this stems from their social kinship and the community of political aims. Dozens and hundreds of thousands of voters have agreed on one candidate after a detailed discussion. This is a sign of socialism, a sign that the working masses have no internal antagonisms, nor can they have any..."

But, of course, the joint nomination does not mean that the candidate will necessarily be elected. Everything is decided at the polls. During the last elections to the republican Supreme Soviets and local Soviets of People's Deputies on February 24, 1985, for instance, ninety candidates failed to get the necessary majority of votes. As a result, new candidates were nominated and fresh elections were held.

But still someone may ask why we have only one candidate standing in each constituency and not two or three. Besides tradition, there are also other reasons for that. The most important is that in the USSR all candidates campaign on an identical political, economic and social platform. This platform is worked out by the CPSU in the interests of the whole people. At the elections the Communists campaign in alliance with those who are not Party members. Consequently, the competition among candidates in the USSR centres not on their election programmes but exclusively on their professional and social qualities. Under these circumstances the stage-by-stage system of choosing the most worthy representatives of the population for government office offers a greater guarantee against a wrong choice than the system whereby candidates are selected at the polls only.

Incidentally, on the eve of each election the country's mass media carry an appeal from the CPSU Central Committee to the voters, a kind of election manifesto issued by the alliance of Communists and people who are not Party members. It formulates the objectives and tasks the deputies of the alliance are going to carry out if they are elected.

For instance, before the last elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR the Party Central Committee issued an Appeal saying that per capita real incomes had increased by 13 per cent since the previous elections in 1979. Nearly 50 million people had improved their housing conditions while rent and utility charges remained stable, not exceeding three per cent of the income of a worker's family. The Appeal underlined that the Party would continue to work for satisfying more fully the material and cultural requirements of the Soviet people, for improving their housing conditions, and social, cultural and everyday services facilities, and for expanding the output of consumer goods and improving their quality.

The Appeal also noted the present grave situation on the world scene and stressed that the CPSU would not depart from the Peace Programme adopted by its congresses. It reaffirmed that the Soviet Union did not encroach on the security of any country, whether in the West or in the East. It wishes to live in peace with all countries and put into practice the principle of peaceful coexistence between states with different social and political systems. Expressing the views of the whole Soviet people, the Communist Party and government of the USSR would do all they could to avert the threat of war and to preserve peace for the present and future generations.

Such a policy meets the interests of all Soviet people. This, among other things, explains why elec-

tions in the USSR are usually marked by a high voters' turnout—practically all the adults take part in the voting. This fact is sometimes interpreted in the Western press as “compulsory” voting.

But there is no law on compulsory voting in the USSR, and going to the polls is regarded as a right and not as a duty of the voters. So their high turnout at elections is due to quite different factors.

The Soviet state does all it can to enable all its citizens to express their will, including those who are away from their homes on polling day. For instance, at the time of the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, held on March 4, 1984, there were 1,470 Soviet fishing vessels and more than 1,500 merchant, passenger and research ships in various parts of the World Ocean. Their crews totalled over 100,000. The district electoral commissions set up on these ships sent messages with the results of the voting by radio to the ports of their registration. The records were also later dispatched by air or by sea.

It was more difficult to hold elections at the places of work of prospecting and surveying teams—in the fields, in dense Siberian forests, in the tundra, and in the mountains. There were approximately 40,000 people there on March 4. Ballot-boxes were brought to them by aircraft and helicopters. The Ministry of Civil Aviation had set aside a special reserve fleet for this purpose.

And for train and airliner passengers—there were more than 200,000 of them on that day—polling booths were fitted out at airports, railway terminals and major railway stations.

Such are the main principles of the Soviet electoral system. Their implementation enables all classes and social groups to take part in deciding important questions of state policy. The present composition of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR fully bears this out.



The total number of deputies is 1,500, with industrial workers (527 in all) and collective farmers (242) making up an absolute majority—51.3 per cent. Among the deputies there are 52 scientists, 55 writers and artists, journalists and professional people, 19 teachers and 15 doctors. Leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet state have also been elected deputies to the highest body of state authority alongside factory managers, specialists working in various sectors of the economy, Party, trade union and Young Communist League officials, and servicemen.

Woman deputies number 492, or one-third of the total. There are more woman deputies in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR than in the parliaments of all the developed capitalist countries taken together.

Different age groups are also widely represented in the highest body of state authority. There are 331 deputies under the age of 30 (22 per cent), 934 deputies aged between 30 and 60 (62.3 per cent) and 235 deputies above 60 years of age (15.7 per cent).

Most of the deputies have either a secondary or higher education (97.2 per cent). But there are also members of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR who have only an incomplete secondary and even primary education. As a rule, they are elderly people with much experience in life. The number of deputies elected for the first time is 876, or 58.4 per cent.

The multinational nature of the Soviet state is clearly reflected in the composition of the highest body of state authority. The Supreme Soviet of the present convocation includes deputies of 63 nationalities. Among them are representatives of all the nations and ethnic groups which gave their names to the Union and Autonomous Republics and the Autonomous Regions and Areas.

Take, for instance, Nikolai Polozov, 63, a Byelo-

russian by nationality. He has headed the Trade Union Council in his Republic for more than 15 years. The Council unites more than five million members of various industrial unions. He is also a member of the Presidium of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions. Elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for the fourth time, he is a member of the Standing Commission on Public Health and Social Security in the Soviet of Nationalities.

Nikolai Polozov said that he had never intended to embark on a political career. Born into a peasant family, he lost his parents when he was nine years old and was brought up in an orphanage. He looked forward to becoming a teacher, which was natural for people of his generation—seventy-five per cent of the Byelorussians were illiterate before the 1917 Socialist Revolution.

He did become a teacher, but shortly afterwards the Second World War broke out. When the Nazis occupied the area of Byelorussia where he lived, Polozov joined the partisans. After the war he worked with various trade union and Party bodies and more than once attended the sessions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). That body had adopted, on the initiative of the delegation from the Byelorussian SSR, a memorandum on the priority tasks of the ILO in solving social and economic problems that are of vital importance for the working people and a resolution calling on the ILO to help prevent the brain drain from developing countries.

Whenever he has a chance, Nikolai Polozov visits factories, construction sites or collective farms where he meets as many people as possible and learns about their needs firsthand. He is an unassuming, considerate man, with vast experience in life. All that

coupled with his professional competence has won him high prestige and popularity.

Or take another deputy, Nikolai Zlobin, a 54-year-old building team leader of the Moscow Region. He was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for the third time in 1984. His name is associated with what is known as the team contract, a popular form of the organisation of labour in the USSR. In 1983 the CPSU Central Committee, the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the All-Union Council of Trade Unions adopted a joint decision on further developing the "Zlobin team method". Thus a working man became the author of an innovation which helps raise the efficiency of the socialist economy. Nikolai Zlobin has been twice awarded the title of Hero of Socialist Labour and is a winner of the USSR State Prize.

Nikolai Zlobin is a member of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet and in that capacity he calls to the attention of the government various questions relating to improving the country's economy. And he always finds support, for he reflects the views of the country's working class. Nikolai Zlobin is also a member of the Committee of the USSR Parliamentary Group.

Natalia Gellert, a tractor driver from the Amangeldy state farm in the Tselinograd Region in Kazakhstan, was first elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR when she was just 25. She was again returned to parliament in the last general elections. She is Chairwoman of one of the Standing Commissions in the Soviet of Nationalities dealing with questions of the working and everyday-life conditions of women and mother and child care. What has she done to win the confidence of her voters?

Natalia Gellert grew up in a farmers' family. Her German parents (there are nearly two million Ger-

mans living in the USSR according to the 1979 Census) were among those who took part in developing virgin lands in Kazakhstan in the 1950s. More than 42 million hectares were ploughed up in the Soviet Union in those years which is approximately equal to the territory of Western Europe without its islands and archipelagos. Natalia Gellert's husband is a Kazakh, and their children speak three languages. It is a large and close-knit family.

Natalia says jokingly that her "exotic" profession was partly responsible for her nomination for the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The fact is that there are not many women in the Tselinograd Region who drive a K-701 tractor (700 hp). Natalia Gellert, operating such a machine, fulfills in one day one and a half or even two daily quotas and has won both national and international prizes at contests of tractor drivers. She is active in introducing the Zlobin method in agriculture. The team she heads has switched over to a system of the organisation of labour and payment without the use of written orders, and this has made it possible to raise productivity by 50 per cent and improve efficiency.

Voters have long known Natalia Gellert as a capable and public-spirited person. She had been elected to the District and Regional Soviets of People's Deputies and had in their view lived up to their expectations.

For instance, in carrying out the mandates of her voters, Natalia Gellert helped bring about the building of a number of big industrial projects in the district and region as well as clinics, schools, a large child-care centre, etc. She has several government decorations too.

A member of the Communist Party, Natalia Gellert was elected a delegate to the 27th Party Congress,

and at the Congress she was elected an Alternate Member of the Party Central Committee.

The other deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR have received their mandates for running the Soviet state in about the same way. All of them have won their voters' confidence by their professional qualities, public activity and a keen interest in the needs and cares of their constituencies and of the entire socialist state.

## **Equal Chambers**

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR, reflecting the will of the entire Soviet people, of all the nations and ethnic groups in the country, has a structure which takes into account the national-state system of the Soviet Federation. It consists of two chambers, the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities. The former represents the common interests of all citizens regardless of their nationality. The latter reflects the specific interests of the numerous nations and ethnic groups in the USSR.

Such a parliamentary structure was adopted immediately after the USSR had been formed as a multinational federal state. It was pointed out in the decisions of the 12th Communist Party Congress (April 1923) with regard to the nationalities question that "...a special body should be set up in the system of the Union's supreme institutions that would represent all the republics and regions inhabited by non-Russian nationalities without exception on the principles of equality, with due account of the representation of all the ethnic groups within those republics..." Under the 1924 Constitution of the USSR such a body was the Soviet of Nationalities of the

country's Central Executive Committee and after the 1936 Constitution had been adopted, the Soviet of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

The experience of many years shows that the two-chamber structure of the Supreme Soviet ensures that all important matters are decided on the basis of consistently combining the country's interests with those of the republics, regions and areas inhabited by non-Russian nationalities. This was confirmed once more during the discussion of the draft of the present Constitution in 1977.

In the course of that discussion it was suggested that the Soviet of Nationalities be abolished and a one-chamber legislature be set up. References were made in this connection to the Party's conclusion that a new historical community, the Soviet people, had emerged out of the more than one hundred nations and ethnic groups inhabiting the country on the basis of common objectives and ideals. However, the report of the Constitutional Commission, in summing up the discussion, pointed out that such a move would be wrong. The Commission noted that the Soviet people's social and political unity did not mean the disappearance of the specific features of different nationalities. "Thanks to the consistent implementation of the Leninist nationalities policy," the report said, "we, having built socialism, have simultaneously solved the nationalities problem for the first time in history. The friendship of the Soviet peoples is unbreakable. They are steadily drawing together in the course of communist construction, mutually enriching their cultural life. But we would be embarking on a dangerous path if we started to speed up this objective process artificially..." As a result, the new Constitution of the USSR adopted on October 7, 1977, reaffirmed the two-chamber structure of the Supreme Soviet.

Although there is an outward similarity, the two-chamber structure of the highest body of state authority in the USSR differs fundamentally from the two-chamber parliaments of other countries.

First of all, no other parliament has a chamber which takes into account and reflects the specific interests of nations inhabiting the given country, although there are quite a few multinational states in the world.

Second, both chambers of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR are entirely equal, unlike for instance the Senate and the House of Representatives of the US Congress, the Senate and the National Assembly in France, or the House of Lords and the House of Commons in Britain, in other words, unlike the upper and lower houses of the bourgeois parliaments, for each of them has specific powers of its own.

How is the equality of the two chambers of the highest body of state authority in the USSR expressed in practical terms?

To begin with, paradoxical as it may seem, this equality is guaranteed by the fundamentally different principles of their formation. The Soviet of the Union is elected in accordance with a norm of representation that is uniform throughout the country: one deputy from every constituency with an equal number of residents. For instance, at the general elections held on March 4, 1984, one deputy was elected from every 360,000 residents. But if such a system were used for elections to the Soviet of Nationalities, it would lead to the predominance of representatives from the Russian Federation (population 143,100,000) and the Ukraine (population 50,800,000), while Moldavia, for instance, with its four million inhabitants would have much fewer deputies and would not be able to defend its interests on a par with the larger republics.

To prevent such a situation, the Soviet of Nationalities is elected in accordance with quite different norms: 32 deputies from every Union Republic, 11 deputies from every Autonomous Republic, 5 deputies from every Autonomous Region, and one deputy from every Autonomous Area.

Thus, the number of deputies elected from a republic, region or area to the Soviet of Nationalities does not depend on its population. For instance, both the Russian Federation and Estonia send 32 representatives to the Soviet of Nationalities though the former outnumbers the latter in the size of its population nearly a hundred-fold (143,100,000 and 1,500,000 respectively). Both the Nakhichevan and Bashkir Autonomous Republics (267,000 and 3,900,000 residents respectively) are represented by 11 deputies, and five deputies each are sent by the Jewish and Khakass Autonomous Regions (207,000 and 540,000 residents respectively), and so on.

Both chambers of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR have the same number of deputies—750—and are elected at the same time by secret ballot on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage. Both the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities are elected for a term of five years.

Under the USSR Constitution both chambers have equal rights in initiating legislation. A law is considered adopted if passed by both the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities by a simple majority of votes in each chamber. So, neither of them can impose its will on the other either directly or indirectly.

But what if there is disagreement between the two chambers? In such cases, according to the country's Constitution, the matter at issue is referred to a conciliation commission formed by the chambers on a parity basis. After that it is considered for a second

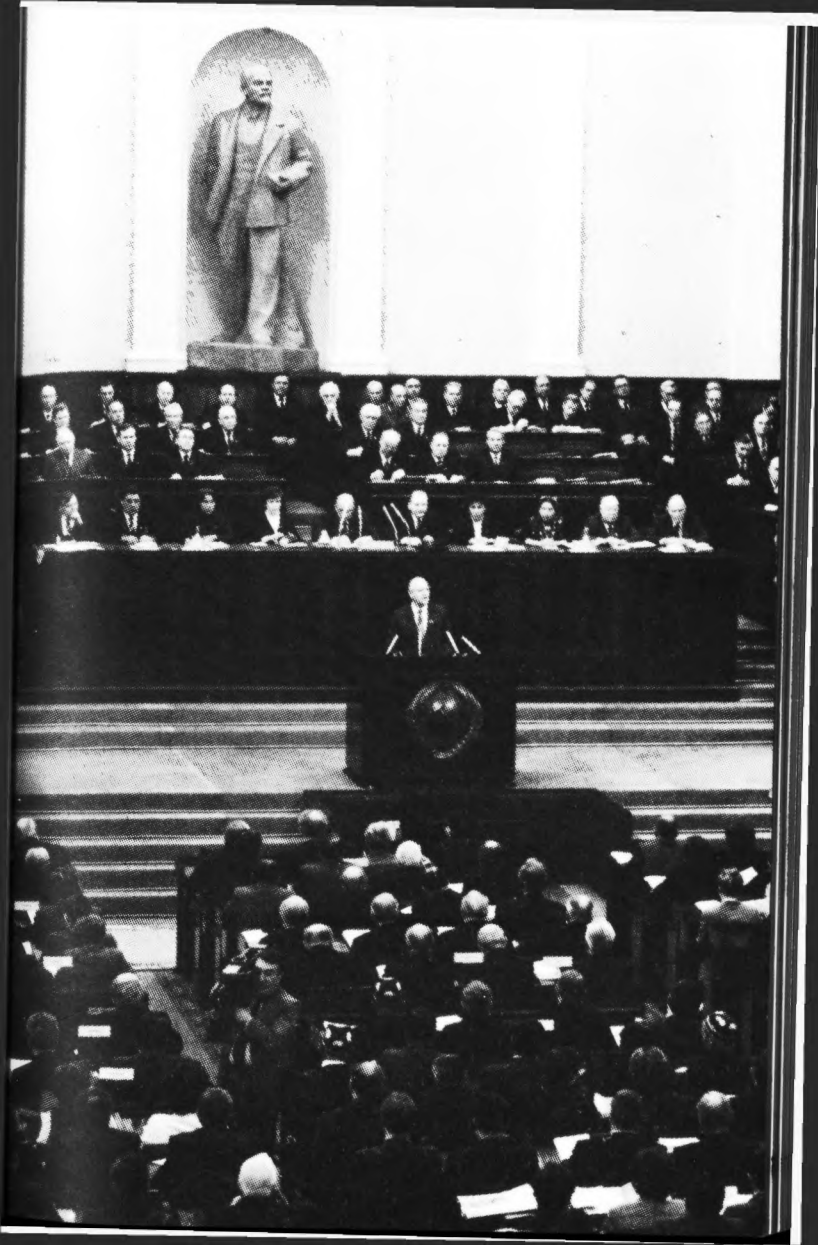


time by both chambers at a joint sitting. If the members of the commission fail to come to an agreement or if its ruling fails to satisfy either side, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR refers the matter to the next session or submits it to a nationwide vote (referendum).

The equality of the chambers is also seen by the fact that both of them take part in the formation of the central executive bodies of government on a parity basis and have the same rights in supervising their activities. For instance, the Supreme Soviet at a joint sitting of both chambers elects the country's collective President, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, forms the USSR government—the Council of Ministers of the USSR, elects the Supreme Court of the USSR, and appoints the Procurator-General of the USSR.

Both the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities follow the same procedure which also helps to ensure equality in practical terms. Any bill is discussed or adopted by them in the same manner and at the same time. If the discussion takes place at a joint sitting, the voting is conducted separately all the same. The joint sittings of both chambers are not presided over by the speaker of one of them as is the case in some countries. They are conducted by the Chairmen of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities by turns. Both chambers also have the same number of auxiliary working bodies, or standing commissions, which prepare matters for

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR in session at the Great Kremlin Palace in Moscow.



A session of the Soviet of the Union of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

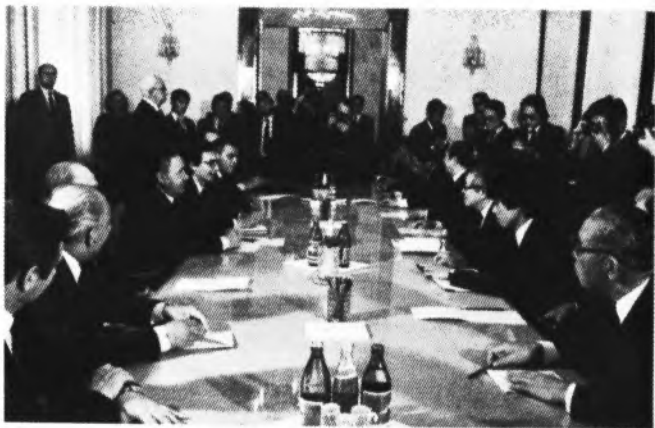


The Soviet of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet in session.

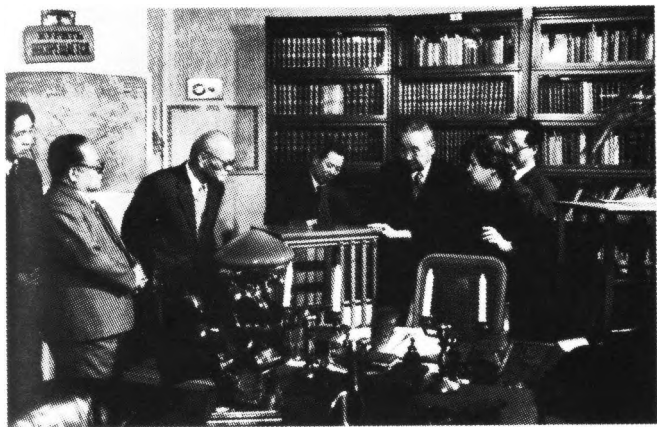


A reception at the Kremlin for  
the heads of diplomatic mis-  
sions located in the USSR.





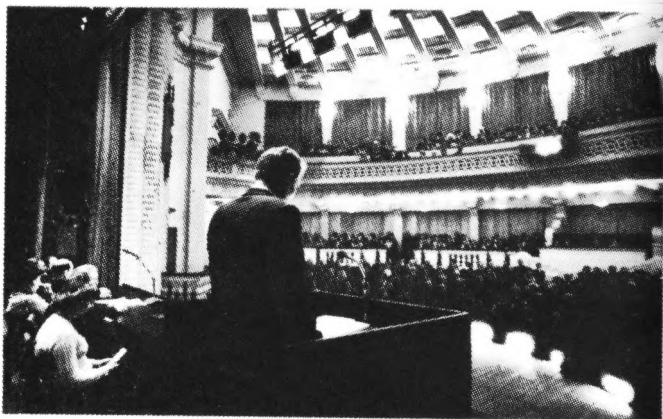
A parliamentary group from Japan being received at the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet.



A delegation of the National People's Congress of China on a tour of Lenin's memorial museum.

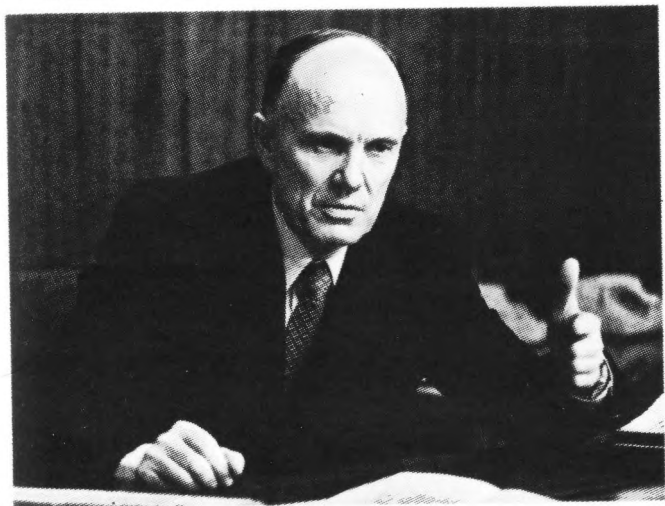
Viktor Pushkarev, leader of a team of grinding machine operators at the Moscow Punch-Card Machine Factory and deputy to the USSR Su-

preme Soviet, at a meeting with constituents (top) and with members of his team (bottom).



A joint sitting of the Standing Commissions on Foreign Affairs of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities.

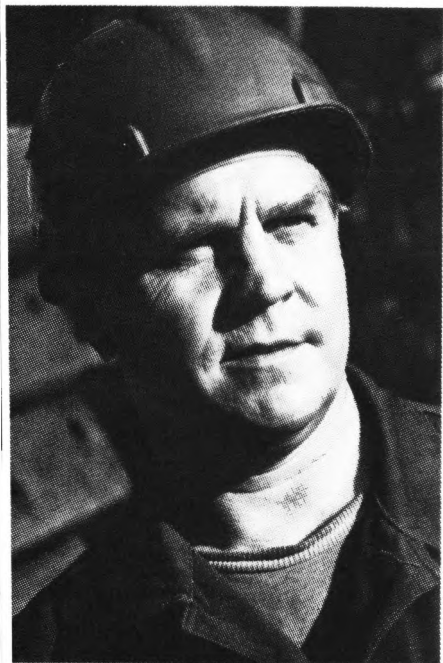
Academician Boris Paton of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Director of the Y. Paton Institute of Electric Welding and deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet.







Natalia Gellert is a tractor driver at the Aman-geldy state farm (Kazakhstan) and an Alternate Member of the CPSU Central Committee. She is also Chairwoman of the Standing Commission on Women's Working and Living Conditions, Mother and Child Care of the Soviet of Nationalities.



Alexander Sukhanov, leader of a construction team at the Moscow underground railway and deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet.



Aivar Mikelson, machine-operator at the Tervete collective farm (the Latvian SSR) and deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet.



Tatyana Minenkova, a worker at the Schyot-mash calculating machine plant in the city of Kursk and deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet.





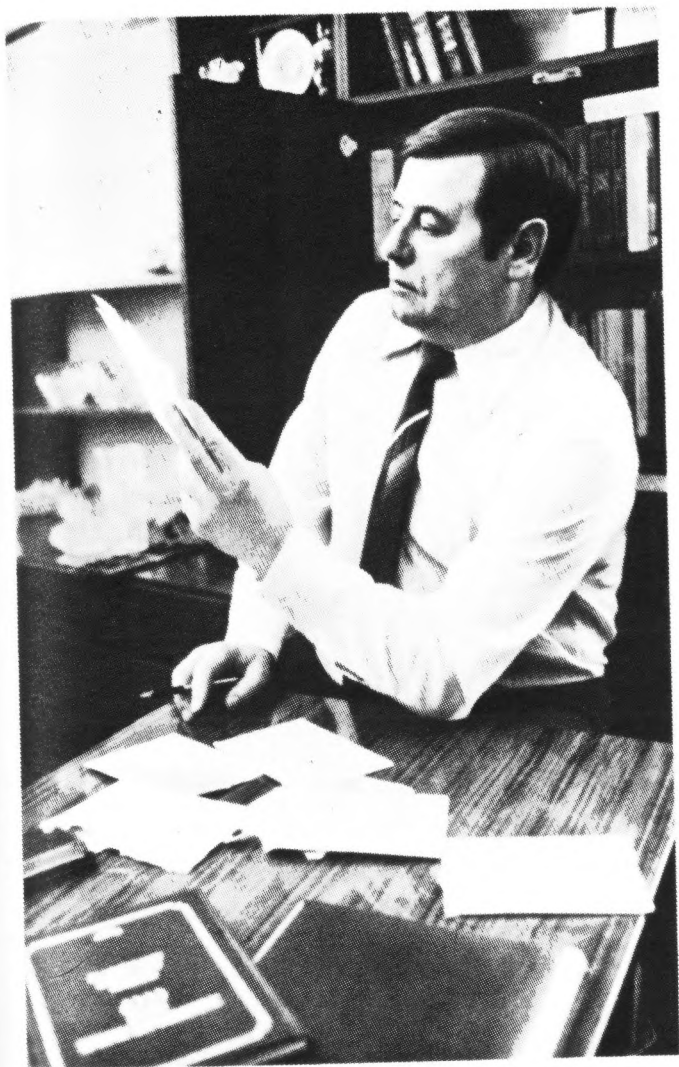
Gulinor Ruziyeva, cotton-picking machine-operator at the Lenin collective farm (the Tajik SSR), and deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet.

Sergei Rukavichnikov, deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet (second left), with a group of designers from the State Research Institute of the Timber Industry (the Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic).



Textile worker Rimma Gavrilova, Hero of Socialist Labour, winner of the State Prize, and member of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

Rudolf Stakheyev, leader of a miners' team and member of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, going through his mail.





Karamat Yakubayeva, a worker at the Tashkent textile mill in the Uzbek SSR, and deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet (second right).

discussion at a session and supervise the execution of previously adopted decisions. The membership of those commissions is also equal.

All proposals from deputies of the Union and Autonomous Republics, the Autonomous Regions and Areas come to the Soviet of Nationalities and its standing commissions. The two-chamber structure enables the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to exercise leadership over the multinational Soviet state with maximum efficiency and flexibility.

## **Sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR**

Sessions are the most important form of the Supreme Soviet's activities. Under the USSR Constitution they are convened twice a year. There is also a provision for convening extraordinary sessions. The latter may be convened on the initiative of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, of one or several Union Republics, or of not less than one-third of the deputies to one of the chambers. For instance, it was an extraordinary session held in October 1977 that adopted the country's present Constitution.

A session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR consists of separate and joint sittings of the chambers, and of meetings of the standing commissions of the chambers or commissions of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR held between the sittings of the chambers.

In keeping with tradition, every session is preceded by the meetings of the Councils of Elders of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities. The Councils are consultative bodies made up of representatives from various groups of deputies. Such



meetings usually draw up the agenda of the coming session and decide on the order of business.

The Council of Elders of the Soviet of the Union is formed of representatives from groups of deputies elected to the chamber by constituencies with equal populations in various territories, regions, or republics. Each group sends one representative to the Council. If more than 10 deputies have been elected to the Soviet of the Union from a territory, region or republic, two representatives are sent, and if more than 20 deputies have been elected, three representatives are sent. These are usually the more experienced and respected deputies, and hence the name itself—the Council of Elders.

The Council of Elders of the Soviet of Nationalities consists of representatives from groups of deputies elected to the chamber from every Union Republic (six representatives from each), from every Autonomous Republic (two representatives) and from every Autonomous Region (one representative). Deputies elected from Autonomous Areas are also included.

The national flag of the USSR is hoisted over the Great Kremlin Palace on a session's opening day. Usually both chambers of the Supreme Soviet hold their joint sittings in the Palace. Its enormous hall seats 2,500 of which about 900 are guests—both Soviet citizens and foreign nationals. A number of boxes are set aside for diplomats and newsmen accredited in Moscow.

Separate sittings of the chambers are held in the building of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The seats of deputies in that large semi-circular hall rise behind and above each other as in an amphitheatre. There are about a thousand seats in all.

Traditionally, the first session of every convocation

is opened by the oldest deputy. His opening speech is followed by the forming of the leading bodies of the chambers. Deputies to the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities elect from their midst the Chairman and four Vice-Chairmen of each chamber. The latter preside over the sittings of the chambers, they decide the order of business, endorse the lists of speakers, read out deputies' questions and set deadlines for replies. Between sessions the Chairmen of the chambers take part in the meetings of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, help in the work of the standing commissions of the respective chambers and represent the latter in receiving foreign parliamentarians, statesmen and public leaders.

At every session separate and joint sittings of the chambers are held. As a rule, joint sittings are held to hear reports on matters to be discussed in both chambers. The practice of hearing reports at joint sittings and of discussing them separately is followed, for instance, when the drafts of state plans, the national budget and important bills are considered.

The sittings of both chambers of the Soviet parliament, in keeping with its rules, are open, and representatives from government bodies, public organisations, work collectives and the mass media are invited to attend. However, both chambers may also decide to hold closed sessions whenever necessary.

Problems of the country's economic and social development figure prominently among the questions considered by the sessions. This is explained by the fact that the Soviet economic system is based on public ownership of the means of production and that its development is planned. The deputies, when discussing the drafts of various laws, of annual and long-term national plans and when endorsing the national budget, seek the most efficient ways of

developing the economy and improving the wellbeing of the Soviet people.

A striking case in point was the 4th Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of the present, eleventh convocation held in November 1985. Among other things, it discussed four important items: the state plan for economic and social development of the USSR for 1986 and the progress in carrying out the same in 1985; the USSR state budget for 1986 and the execution of the same in 1984; amendments to the Fundamentals of Legislation on Public Education of the USSR and Union Republics and other laws of the USSR in connection with the Guidelines for the reform of general and vocational schools endorsed by the Plenary Meeting of the CPSU Central Committee in April 1984 and by the First Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of the present convocation; and the results of the Soviet-US Summit in Geneva and the world situation as a whole.

A report on the first item was made at a joint sitting of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities by the First Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Chairman of the State Planning Committee (the top planning body) of the USSR Nikolai Talyzin. Among other things, he summed up what had been done by the government in 1985 to promote economic growth, improve the economic management mechanism, raise the level of organisation, and enhance state, labour and planning discipline. It was noted with satisfaction that the national income had gone up by 3.5 per cent as compared with 1984, while gross industrial output had risen by 3.9 per cent. About 200 new industrial enterprises were put into operation. Gross farm output rose by 2,100 million roubles in comparable prices; state purchases of cattle, poultry, milk and eggs and the output of milk, meat, fish and other

foodstuffs had also increased, which made it possible to improve food supplies to the population.

The main aim of the Soviet Union's economic policy is steadily to increase the wellbeing of the people and improve cultural and everyday services facilities. The speaker underlined in this connection that there had been an increase in real incomes in 1985. The average monthly pay of factory workers and office employees had reached 190 roubles, while pay for collective farmers for their work in collective farms had exceeded 150 roubles a month, with the prices of the main consumer goods and foodstuffs remaining stable. Further progress had been made in the construction of housing and utility facilities and in the development of education and public health service. The new housing built in 1985 with the use of all sources of financing totalled 113 million square metres of floor space. In the same period schools for 1,028,000 pupils and clinics for 137,500 visits a shift had been built.

While noting that the results of economic development in 1985 were good on the whole, Nikolai Talyzin pointed out that a number of plan targets for the year had not been fulfilled. The reasons for the lag lay chiefly in the fact that a number of industries had been too slow in going over to intensive methods of economic management and had failed to organise their work properly.

The speaker submitted to the deputies for consideration the draft state plan for 1986 based on the results of 1985 and the Guidelines for the Economic and Social Development of the USSR for 1986-1990 and for the Period Ending in 2000. The draft outlined concrete ways of attaining the set objectives, which are to secure a sharp increase in the efficiency of social production, reshape planning and management, and redefine structural and investment policies.

A distinctive feature of this plan was higher economic growth rates, acceleration of scientific and technological progress and improvement of the structure of the economy. National income used for consumption and accumulation was to be increased by 3.8 per cent a year compared to 3.2 per cent in the 1981-1985 period, industrial output was to go up by 4.3 per cent against 3.7 per cent, while farm output was to rise by 4.4 per cent.

In view of the strategy for speeding up scientific and technological progress the 1986 plan paid special attention to the development of science and technology. It included 1,150 assignments in those fields of science and technology that are of key economic importance, including assignments for developing new-generation machines and equipment. The total spending on science was to increase by 5.5 per cent.

Much would also be done to raise the people's wellbeing: to increase the average monthly pay for factory workers and office employees as well as payment for collective farmers, to improve pension schemes and medical services, to increase government allowances for families with children, senior citizens and invalids. Allocations from the state budget for those purposes in 1986 were put at 3,000 million roubles. Approximately another 10 million people would be rehoused.

And of course one of the major tasks of the coming year was further to increase the output of consumer goods with emphasis on better quality and greater variety.

Such was in general outline the state plan for economic and social development of the USSR in 1986 described by Nikolai Talyzin, First Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Chairman of the country's State Planning Committee. A report on the financial backing for the plan,

that is, on the draft state budget for 1986, was made at the same joint sitting by Viktor Dementsev, First Deputy Minister of Finance of the USSR.<sup>1</sup>

That was followed by the separate sittings of the two chambers at which the deputies considered the government-proposed draft state plan and budget for 1986 as well as the results of carrying out the 1985 plan and the budget for 1984. Among the speakers in the debate were the Chairmen of the Planning and Budgetary Commissions of the Soviet of the Union and of the Soviet of Nationalities who had studied those documents on instructions from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and many other deputies. They examined in detail the situation in every sector of the economy and in the economy of every Union Republic, proceeding from the strategy of the CPSU and the entire Soviet state of speeding up the rate of economic and social development.

Sharp criticism was levelled at the leading officials of the Ministries of the Oil, Iron-and-Steel, Chemical, Power, and Building Materials Industries which were responsible for the lag in carrying out the 1985 plan. To ensure more reliable power supply to the economy, it was proposed that the Ministry of Power of the USSR be allocated an additional 600 million roubles in 1986 for building the necessary reserve capacities for power generation.

Deputies were particularly concerned about the state of affairs in housing construction, which is taking place in the USSR on a vast scale. It was noted that although the industrial methods of house-building were widely used, the development of housing estates in many populated centres often fell behind schedule. Commissioning houses without

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<sup>1</sup> At present Viktor Dementsev is Chairman of the Board of the State Bank of the USSR.

completing local improvement work had become almost routine practice. The principle of building housing estates together with the necessary shopping and everyday services facilities was often not observed. All that gave rise to numerous and justified complaints from the new tenants. This was largely due to the fact, the speakers emphasised, that local Soviets of People's Deputies, which were in charge of the areas in which construction work was going on, were insufficiently exacting towards the construction organisations. The local Soviets were asked to change their attitude towards that important matter.

As the problems of housing construction were concerned, the deputies concluded that the USSR ministries and other government departments as well as the Councils of Ministers of the Union Republics should give further consideration to every aspect of this matter in the coming year. The Supreme Soviet instructed them to revise their plans so as to prevent the scattering of investments, resources and the capacities of construction organisations, to streamline construction work and to be more exacting with regard to the quality of the projects submitted for commissioning.

After studying the draft plan and budget for 1986 deputies in both chambers found it possible to raise the annual targets for the output of many types of consumer goods, including shoes, fabrics, refrigerators, crockery, building materials and tools, car and motorcycle spare parts whose total worth would come to 182.9 million roubles. It was proposed that the money from the sale of those goods should be channelled into the budgets of the Union Republics to be used for local improvement in the cities, industrial towns and rural district centres as well as for providing office facilities for rural and village Soviets.

At the next joint sitting of both chambers the

Supreme Soviet, by a separate vote, adopted the Law on the State Plan for the Economic and Social Development of the USSR for 1986 and the State Budget for the same year, taking into account all amendments and proposals.

The next item on the agenda concerned amendments to the Fundamentals of Legislation on Public Education of the USSR and the Union Republics and to other legislative acts of the USSR in connection with the Guidelines for the reform of general secondary and vocational schools. A report on this question was made at a joint sitting of the two chambers by the USSR Minister of Justice Boris Kravtsov.

The school reform in the USSR got under way in 1984. The aim is to perfect the entire system of education in view of the need to speed up the country's social and economic development, radically to improve the contents and organisation of the teaching and training process and the labour training and career guidance for school pupils and to supplement universal secondary education with universal vocational training.

Naturally, the new tasks set to the general secondary and vocational schools demanded that the legislation in this field should be brought into line with the guidelines of the reform. So, as far back as April 12, 1984, the Supreme Soviet instructed its Presidium and the Council of Ministers of the USSR to draft proposals on introducing the necessary amendments to that legislation. This work was carried out by the Standing Commissions on Public Education and Culture and on Legislative Proposals of both chambers. Taking part in the work were the Ministry of Education of the USSR, the State Committee of the USSR on Vocational Training, the Ministry of Higher and Specialised Secondary Education of the



USSR, the Ministry of Justice of the USSR, the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, the Central Committee of the Young Communist League, and other ministries and government departments.

As the speaker pointed out, the changes affected first of all the Fundamentals of Legislation on Public Education of the USSR and the Union Republics. Sixty out of a total of 65 articles were substantially revised and nine more were added. They stress that a qualitatively new feature of the Soviet school consists not only in providing universal secondary education but also in stepping up the labour and vocational training of young people. That was a matter of fundamental importance. The secondary schools are therefore obliged to give their pupils both general educational and polytechnical training so that each of them will learn the basics of a trade.

In keeping with the reform, the articles on the management of public education were also revised. First, central government bodies in charge of education—the Ministry of Education, the State Committee for Vocational Training and the Ministry of Higher and Specialised Secondary Education—should pursue an identical policy in training skilled workers and specialists for the national economy. Second, the Soviets of People's Deputies will play a much bigger role in implementing this policy. They are to carry out the changeover to universal vocational training and assist schools in choosing and placing teaching personnel. The Executive Committees of the local Soviets will determine the types of labour training for school pupils, organise this training taking into account the needs of the national economy for skilled personnel, assist in the employment of school graduates, and help young workers and specialists to stay on their jobs.

The draft new edition of the Fundamentals of Legislation on Public Education of the USSR and the Union Republics submitted to the deputies for consideration also contains a new article on the scientific basis of public education. It outlines the tasks of science in solving the problems of young people's training and education, the interconnection between science and practice, and the introduction of scientific, technological and cultural achievements into the training and educational process. A number of changes were also made in the structure of general secondary and vocational training. It would now take 11 years (and not 10 as before) to complete general secondary education. Children would start school at the age of 6, instead of 7 as before.

Following the speech by Boris Kravtsov, a co-report on the subject was made by Pyotr Fedoseyev, Chairman of the Standing Commission on Public Education and Culture of the Soviet of Nationalities. He spoke on behalf of the Commissions on Public Education and Culture and those on Legislative Proposals of both chambers. The speaker told the Supreme Soviet that the drafts submitted for its consideration took into account all the remarks and wishes of the deputies who had worked on them and recommended that they should be passed into law. The Commissions believe, the speaker said, that their adoption would consolidate the legal basis for the further development of public education in the USSR in keeping with the dynamics of our time and the needs of speeding up social, economic, scientific, and technological progress.

The matter was then put to a vote. The deputies voted unanimously for the amendments to the Fundamentals of Legislation on Public Education of the USSR and the Union Republics and to other USSR legislative acts in connection with the

Guidelines for the reform of general secondary and vocational schools.

The high point of the session was a speech by Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Mikhail Gorbachev reported to the deputies on the results of his meeting with President Reagan in Geneva on November 19-21, 1985, and outlined the Soviet Union's stand on the key issues of détente. He also described the contents of the new Soviet peace initiatives.

After discussing the report by Mikhail Gorbachev, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR unanimously adopted a resolution "On the Results of the Soviet-American Summit in Geneva and the International Situation", drafted by the Foreign Affairs Commissions of both chambers. The resolution notes that at the present crucial stage in international relations, when mankind is confronted with the choice between survival and the threat of annihilation, the Soviet-US Summit was necessary and useful. And although it did not prove possible at that meeting to find solutions to the main issues connected with the task of ending the arms race and strengthening peace, its results create an opportunity to move away from the present state of dangerous confrontation to a constructive search for ways of normalising Soviet-US relations and improving the international situation as a whole. The accords reached on continuing meetings between the leaders of the USSR and the USA and on promoting dialogue at other levels, as well as exchanges and contacts in bilateral relations, on speeding up the work at the Geneva talks on nuclear and space arms with the aim of averting an arms race in outer space and ending it on Earth and on giving a new impetus to efforts along other lines towards limiting and reducing ar-

maments are designed to facilitate this. The Soviet Union will do all it can to translate these accords into practical deeds and expresses the hope that the United States will display an equally responsible approach.

The resolution goes on to say: "The Supreme Soviet of the USSR believes that what is absolutely essential at present is mutual restraint, renunciation of any actions that would create obstacles to negotiations and strict and conscientious observance of existing agreements in the field of arms limitation, first and foremost the treaty concluded in 1972 for an indefinite period of time between the USSR and the USA on the limitation of ABM systems, which is an important basis of strategic stability and of the entire process of limiting and reducing nuclear arms. Keeping outer space free of arms is of decisive importance for achieving agreements on radical reductions of nuclear arms and, in the long term, their complete elimination by all nuclear states.

"The Supreme Soviet of the USSR confirms the Soviet Union's readiness to extend its moratorium on all nuclear explosions if the United States takes a similar step, and also to start negotiations immediately on the conclusion of an international treaty banning all types of nuclear weapon tests.

"The Supreme Soviet of the USSR declares that the Soviet Union will continue to pursue purposefully its principled course of removing the nuclear threat and developing international relations in the spirit of peaceful coexistence and détente."

## **Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR**

Sessions of the Supreme Soviet are convened twice a year, as a rule, and each of them lasts a relatively

short time. However, this does not mean that parliamentary activity ends with that. It is carried on by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. This is a standing body of the Supreme Soviet, accountable to it for all its work and exercising the functions of the highest body of state authority of the USSR between sessions of the Supreme Soviet, within the limits prescribed by the Constitution.

The Presidium is elected from among the deputies at the first session of the Supreme Soviet of each new convocation at a joint sitting of both chambers. It consists of a Chairman, First Vice-Chairman, 15 Vice-Chairmen (Chairmen of the Presidiums of the Supreme Soviets of the Union Republics are usually elected to these posts), a Secretary and 21 members.

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of the present, eleventh convocation is chaired by Andrei Gromyko, a prominent statesman, who was Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR for 28 years. Andrei Gromyko is a member of the Political Bureau of the CPSU Central Committee. Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, and other leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet state were also elected to the Presidium together with other deputies, among them factory workers, collective farmers, scientists, professional people and leaders of various public organizations. They include Nikolai Zlobin, a building team leader, Nina Ryzhova, an electric welder, Rudolf Stakheyev, a mining team leader, Stepan Shalayev, Chairman of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, Rimma Gavrilova, a textile worker, Academician Nikolai Basov, Rasul Gamzatov, an Avar poet, Alexander Ghitalov, a tractor driver, Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman cosmonaut, President of the Soviet Women's Committee and others. Tengiz Menteshashvili was elected Secretary of the Presidium.

Thus, among the members of the Presidium are not only people holding responsible government or Party posts, but also those working in industry, agriculture and in various branches of science, technology and culture.

What are the powers of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR?

Between sessions of the Supreme Soviet the Presidium makes decisions on current issues of the country's political and economic development, and considers and decides matters relating to the country's defence and the pursuance of its foreign policy. It issues acts regulating the financial and budgetary activities of government bodies. Questions of a further improvement of the people's wellbeing, strengthening of socialist legality and protection of citizens' legitimate rights and interests are always at the centre of its attention.

The Presidium adopts its decisions in the form of decrees and resolutions. Some of them, for instance, those concerning changes in the country's legislation, require subsequent approval by the entire Supreme Soviet at its regular session. During the term of office of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of the tenth convocation (1979-1984) its Presidium adopted 219 acts concerning the development and perfection of all-Union legislation. They included 100 acts on new legislative decisions, 78 on amendments to individual laws, 28 on questions connected with their modification and 13 explaining various laws and the limits of their application.

Among the most important acts adopted in that period aimed at improving the people's wellbeing were decrees changing the pension laws. They pro-

vide for increments to pensions for an uninterrupted service record, increasing the maximum pensions for disabled veterans of the Great Patriotic War and a further improvement of pension schemes for the families of servicemen killed in action during the war. Practically every Soviet family has benefited from the decrees of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on increasing government assistance to families with children and on increasing minimum pensions and other measures to improve pension schemes. The Presidium has also adopted a number of decrees on improving health protection and preserving the country's natural wealth. Among them were decrees on administrative responsibility for violating forest and water laws and laws on the protection of the atmospheric air, and on responsibility for polluting the sea with oil or other substances harmful to people's health or to marine life.

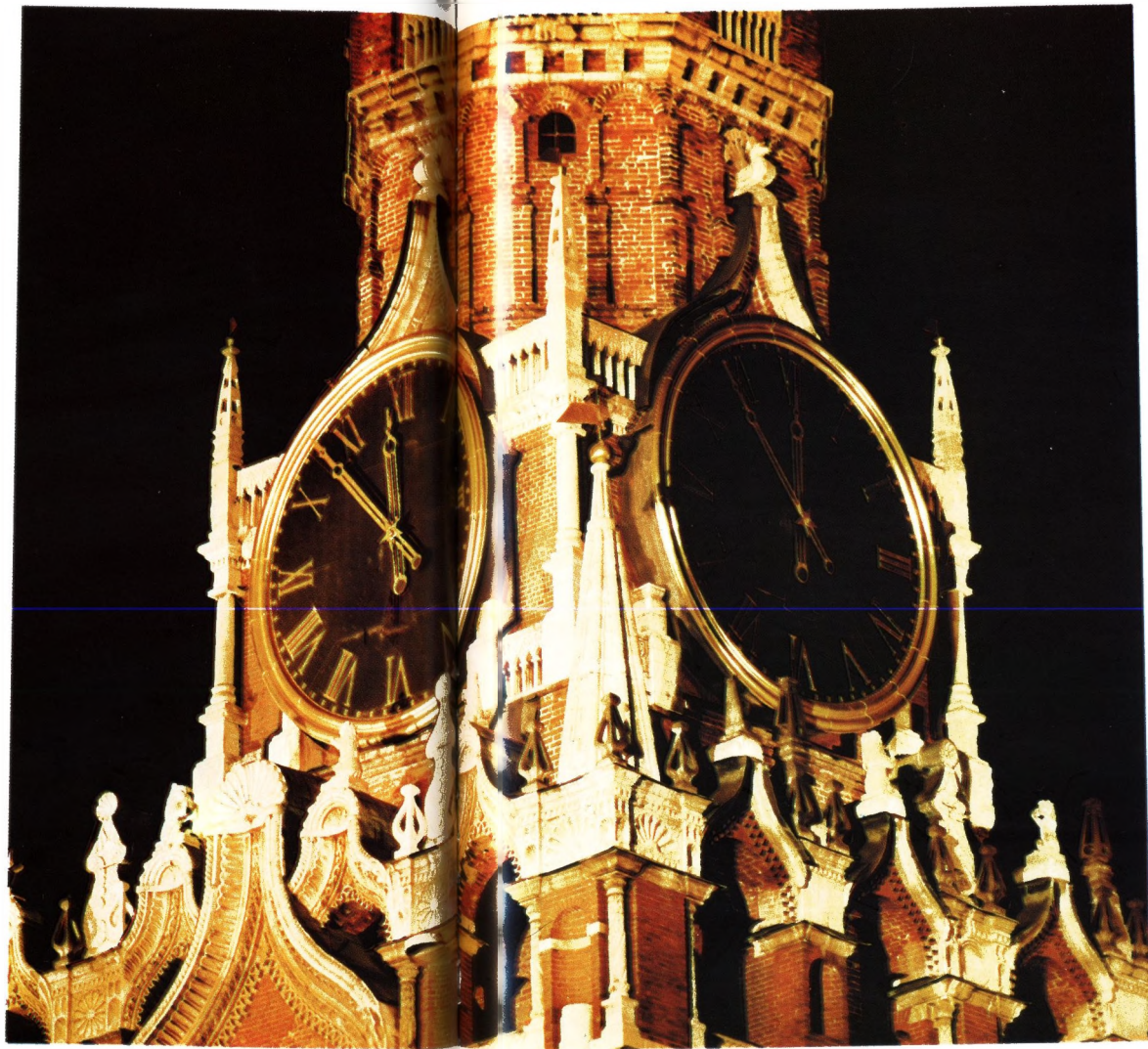
The present Presidium of the Supreme Soviet pursues the same policy which is in keeping with the strategic line of the Soviet state. For instance, after the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR held in March 1984, its Presidium adopted decrees on exempting the Heroes of the Soviet Union and persons decorated with the Order of Glory of all three classes from paying all types of taxes, on increasing disability pensions for servicemen and their families, on proclaiming September 1 (the start of the academic year in the USSR) Knowledge Day, and on stricter measures for the conservation of environment

Vladimir Lenin addressing the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets which elected the country's highest body of state authority. (Painting by Vladimir Serov.)





The Kremlin tower  
clock.





A view of Red Square and the  
Kremlin.





A group of foreigners on a  
tour of the Kremlin.





Various antiques are on display in the Kremlin's museums.





A park near the Kremlin wall.





The Kremlin's Palace of Congresses where the congressional sessions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union are held.



Two deputies to the USSR Supreme Soviet, Nikolai Zlobin, a construction worker, and Vladimir Yarygin, a turner, during a break at the 27th Congress of the CPSU.







The building of the Supreme  
Soviet of the USSR.



in the Far North and the sea off the Northern coast of the USSR.

Between sessions the Presidium also decides matters concerning the formation and reorganisation of ministries and other government departments, and the relief of individual members of the government of their duties and the appointment of persons to the government posts on the recommendation of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. Such questions arise rather often, especially in view of the current large-scale effort to improve economic management. For instance, in the four months between the 3rd and 4th Sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the present, eleventh convocation (from July to November 1985) the Presidium has issued decrees on setting up a joint Union-Republican State Agro-Industrial Committee of the USSR on the basis of several ministries, reorganising the Ministry of Farm Produce Purchases into a Union-Republican Ministry of Grain Products, and forming an All-Union Ministry of Medical Equipment and Microbiological Industries. There had been changes in the leadership of a number of ministries and other departments over that period. All these changes were later approved by the November session of the Supreme Soviet.

The decrees of the Presidium on changes in the boundaries between Union Republics are also subject to approval at a Supreme Soviet session. Such cases are rare nowadays, but they do happen. For instance, in 1972 there were minor changes in the boundaries between the Kirghiz SSR and the Uzbek SSR and between the Tajik SSR and the Uzbek SSR. The decrees on these changes were adopted on the joint recommendations of the Presidiums of the Supreme Soviets of those republics and were later approved by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Decisions on all other matters taken by the Presidium do not need approval by a Supreme Soviet session and are final. However, the Supreme Soviet has the right to ask the Presidium to give an account of any aspect of its work and to examine the expediency of any of its decisions.

In case of need, the Presidium proclaims martial law, orders mobilisation and (between sessions) proclaims a state of war. That was what happened on Sunday, June 22, 1941, the first day of the Great Patriotic War, when the Nazi forces invaded the USSR. On that day the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued a decree on martial law providing for a series of emergency measures in connection with military operations. It should be noted that under the USSR Constitution a state of war may be declared only in the event of an armed attack on the USSR, or when it is necessary to meet international treaty obligations on mutual defence against aggression.

In the foreign-policy field, in accordance with the Constitution, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet alone has the right to ratify and denounce international treaties, to appoint and recall USSR diplomatic representatives, to receive the letters of credence and recall of foreign ambassadors, to ensure the organisation of interparliamentary ties, to check on the government's foreign-policy activities, etc.

During the term of office of the Supreme Soviet of the tenth convocation (1979-1984) there were 77 official visits to the Soviet Union by foreign heads of state and their plenipotentiary representatives arranged by the Presidium. It had also arranged 38 visits by Soviet leaders to other countries. As a result of such meetings and negotiations many inter-state treaties and agreements have been concluded and hundreds of joint documents have been signed. The

Presidium regularly examines the results of such visits, works out and approves plans for the further development of interparliamentary ties.

The Presidium, exercising its constitutional powers, ratified more than 60 international treaties, agreements and protocols over that period. It received the letters of credence from more than 140 foreign ambassadors and appointed new Soviet ambassadors to nearly 100 countries.

According to the Constitution, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet also has the right to grant citizenship of the USSR and rule on matters of the renunciation and deprivation of USSR citizenship, to grant political asylum, to issue acts of amnesty and exercise the right of pardon. Besides, it institutes orders and medals of the USSR and awards them, and institutes honorary titles and confers them. For instance, since 1979 the Presidium has awarded orders and medals to 724,000 people for labour exploits. More than a thousand of them have received the honorary title of Hero of Socialist Labour, the country's highest distinction for achievements in work. Workers engaged in the sphere of material production make up an absolute majority of those decorated—88.3 per cent, with factory workers and collective farmers accounting for 74 per cent. Orders and medals have been awarded to 48,000 scientists, artists, doctors, and teachers for their services in the development of science, culture, education, and health protection. Sixty-six of them received the title of Hero of Socialist Labour. The title of Hero of the Soviet Union was conferred on 90 people for their courage and heroism. Among them were 18 cosmonauts, including those from Hungary, Vietnam, Mongolia, Cuba, Romania, and France.

The Presidium supervises the work of local and republican Soviets of People's Deputies. It considers

the results of elections to these Soviets, and the work of their executive bodies and standing commissions.

For instance, in August 1984 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet discussed the work of the Soviet of People's Deputies of the village of Zaryansk (Rovno Region in the Ukrainian SSR). The Chairman of the Executive Committee of that Soviet delivered a progress report which was followed by a speech by Galina Shegheda, a deputy to the Supreme Soviet. Together with several other members of the Supreme Soviet she had visited the Zaryansk Soviet on instructions from the Presidium to familiarise herself with its work. She had talked with residents in eleven populated centres in its area and taken part in drafting a resolution of the Presidium on the subject.

The resolution noted, among other things, that the Zaryansk Soviet and its Executive Committee, working in close contact with the board of the Zarya Kommunizma (Dawn of Communism) collective farm situated on the territory under its jurisdiction, and with Party, trade union and Young Communist League organisations, were doing a great deal to solve social problems. Several hundred flats and private homes, a community centre, a secondary school, a clinic, a swimming pool, and other leisure and everyday services facilities were built there during the Eleventh Five-Year-Plan period. Steps were being taken to improve working and living conditions as well as leisure facilities for the population. That helped to form stable work collectives and encouraged personnel, especially young people, to settle down in rural areas. Every section of farm production was fully manned. The same was true of schools, medical centres, leisure and everyday services facilities. The collective farm employed 280 specialists with a secondary or higher education.

The rural Soviet conducted its work on the basis of

collective and constructive discussion and solution of all problems and of drawing citizens into its work. Its standing commissions took part in preparing matters for discussion at the Soviet's sessions, gave recommendations concerning the draft plans of the area's economic and social development and addressed sessions with reports on their work. Measures were being taken to tighten control over the implementation of the Soviet's decisions and voters' mandates and the work of the bodies accountable to it.

In its resolution the Presidium recommended that the positive experience of the Zaryansk rural Soviet should be used by all rural Soviets not only in the Ukraine but also in other republics.

In January 1985, the Presidium discussed the work done by the Soviets of the Altai Territory to raise the efficiency of the agro-industrial associations situated in the territory. The discussion aroused a good deal of interest. It was noted that the work of those recently formed bodies of economic management and the measures taken to enhance their role in the development of agriculture and other sectors of the agro-industrial complex were regularly discussed at the sessions of the territorial, regional and district Soviets. Positive experience was summed up and disseminated and the associations were assisted in coordinating the activities of all of their partners. The rural and city Soviets helped increase farm output and the purchase of farm produce by the state and reduce losses.

At the same time the Presidium noted that far from all the Soviets in the territory had achieved the necessary level of coordination and efficiency in the work of the agro-industrial associations so that the latter could put to use all of their reserves and potentialities. For instance, the Soviets were too slow in mastering the science-based zonal systems of farm-

ing and had not used the improved land with maximum efficiency. They had also failed to take the measures to enhance the responsibility of the factories and organisations servicing collective and state farms for the attainment of good end results.

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR asked the Soviets of People's Deputies in the Altai Territory to take further steps to ensure that the agro-industrial associations raise the efficiency of farming, introduce industrial methods on a larger scale and make better use of machines and fertilisers. The agro-industrial associations were to increase their economic efficiency by using financial levers and incentives so that they could further increase the productivity, reduce production costs and raise the profitability of all collective and state farms under their management.

When considering the work of various local or republican government bodies, the Presidium often focusses its attention on the more important aspects of their activities, especially, those concerning the interests of the population. This enables the Presidium to find out in greater detail what concrete problems are solved in the localities, what difficulties arise in the course of this effort, and what can be done to eliminate shortcomings. For instance, in the past few years the Presidium has discussed the work of the Soviets in the Byelorussian SSR in carrying out the USSR Food Programme and the work of the Soviets in the Turkmen SSR in expanding housing construction and utilities and everyday services. The Presidium has also considered the work carried out by the Soviets in a number of republics and regions in compliance with the requirements of legislation on mother and child care, on medical service, on observing housing laws, etc. The results of the discussion and the recommendations worked out in its course

were made known to all other Soviets of People's Deputies.

After assessing the work of individual Soviets, the Presidium makes recommendations and supervises their execution. For instance, in September 1985 the Presidium discussed the work carried out by the Soviets of People's Deputies in the Gorki Region in preparation for the 27th Congress of the CPSU. The resolution adopted by the Presidium and the statements made at the meeting by Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Andrei Gromyko, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and other deputies, while noting the positive aspects of the work of the Soviets in that region, also pointed out its major shortcomings. It was stressed, for instance, that the Soviets and their Executive Committees were not doing enough to fulfill their tasks and were too slow in overcoming shortcomings in the region's economic and social development.

Hardly a month and a half had passed when Andrei Gromyko arrived in the city of Gorki, the administrative centre of the region. He visited a number of factories, talked with their workers and office employees, and addressed a session of the regional Soviet which was also attended by local Party activists.

In his speech Andrei Gromyko noted that the regional Soviet was drawing the right conclusions from the severe but just criticism of its work and seeking to improve its work in the light of the present-day demands. Logically enough, its attention was focussed on the region's economic development, the intensification of production, acceleration of scientific and technological progress, the fuller use of available reserves, better organisation and the strengthening of order and discipline.

On March 31, 1986, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR discussed the tasks of the Soviets of People's Deputies in the light of the decisions of the 27th Congress of the CPSU. The Presidium came to the conclusion that present-day social development in the USSR called for increasing the role and the responsibility of the Soviets for the state of affairs in the localities, for solving key economic and social problems. It was not enough merely to step up the activity of the Soviets. What was needed was a qualitative change in the contents and style of their work, greater publicity and the development of initiative, creative endeavour and innovation.

It was necessary to make the sessions of the Soviets more effective, to increase the role of the standing commissions in carrying out analytical and supervisory work, to improve the practice of deputies' inquiries, and to learn the art of running the state. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted a resolution on the tasks of the Soviets of People's Deputies arising from the decisions of the 27th Congress of the CPSU and a programme of the most important measures to be carried out by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in 1986.

The Presidium receives hundreds of letters from citizens living in various parts of the country every day. The letters contain proposals on improving work in individual sectors of the economy, on perfecting the operation of the state machinery and on strengthening socialist legality; reports on shortcomings in the work of local government bodies; complaints and personal requests. In the first half of 1985, about 130,000 such letters were received by the Presidium. All of them were studied with care and promptly and their authors received well-argued answers. Some of the letters were forwarded to



various government departments so that appropriate measures could be taken. Their execution was strictly verified. Some complaints were checked by members of the Presidium staff who visited the respective localities.

Many citizens apply to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet personally on matters of importance to them. For this purpose they come to the reception room of the Presidium which is situated in the heart of Moscow. At the reception room every visitor has an opportunity to state his case in detail, to talk the matter over with members of the Presidium staff, and get the necessary advice and explanations. Vice-Chairmen of the Presidium receive callers three times a week. More than 19,000 people were received by them in the first half of 1985.

## **Standing Commissions: How They Work**

The standing commissions of the Soviet of the Union and of the Soviet of Nationalities have an important part to play in ensuring the uninterrupted work of the highest body of state authority. They carry out a great amount of analytical and organising work in the course of drafting bills and other documents for the coming sessions.

The standing commissions make preliminary studies of the questions that will be discussed at sessions, help implement decisions adopted by the sessions and supervise the activities of government bodies and organisations responsible for carrying out those decisions. The number of commissions differs from year to year—they are set up when the need

arises. Thus, they reflect various requirements of the country's social and economic development and the directions of the work of the Supreme Soviet.

For instance, on the Presidium's proposal both chambers formed Standing Commissions on Youth Affairs in 1968. This should have stepped up the activity of the Supreme Soviet in dealing with matters concerning the life of Soviet youth, ensured thorough advance preparation of draft decisions submitted to sessions which are directly or indirectly linked with the education and upbringing of youth, vocational training and working and living conditions and leisure facilities for young people. The commissions were also to focus the attention of the Supreme Soviet on all those matters when the latter dealt with other issues of political, economic, social, and cultural development.

In 1970 the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities set up Standing Commissions on Nature Conservation. As the problems of environmental protection and the rational use of natural resources became more and more acute it was necessary to make a more profound study of these problems, and to enhance control over the activities of the executive bodies in this sphere. The same year each of the two chambers set up a Commission on Industry and a Commission on Transport and Communications to replace the former joint commissions dealing with these matters. This would permit a more detailed study of the problems arising in this sphere.

In 1974 the chambers formed Commissions on Consumer Goods. This would have enabled the Supreme Soviet to play a greater role in carrying out the main task of all Soviet five-year plans, that of raising the country's living and cultural standards, and to exercise stricter control over the work of ministries and other departments responsible for in-

creasing the output of consumer goods and improving their quality.

In 1982, when the long-term Energy Programme of the USSR was launched, the chambers, on a proposal from the Presidium, formed Commissions on the Power Industry. Their task was to supervise the work of ministries and other departments responsible for implementing all the provisions of the Programme.

At the first session of the Supreme Soviet of the current convocation, held in 1984, the deputies decided to reorganise the former Commissions on Agriculture into Commissions on the Agro-Industrial Complex in keeping with government measures aimed at improving the management of agriculture and other sectors of the agro-industrial complex.

At the same time the Commissions on Consumer Goods and Commissions on Housing, Utilities and Everyday Services set up earlier were replaced by the Commissions on Consumer Goods and Services to the Population and the Commissions on Housing and Utilities and Municipal Engineering. That was done to take into account the Comprehensive Programme for the Promotion of Consumer Goods Output and Development of Services for 1986-1990 that was being drafted at that time on instructions from the Political Bureau of the CPSU Central Committee. The Programme was adopted in the autumn of 1985.

The system of the standing commissions covers practically all the main spheres of activity of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. There are 34 commissions in all, with each chamber having 17 identical ones. They are: the credentials commissions; the commissions on legislative proposals; the foreign affairs commissions; the planning and budgetary commissions; the commissions on industry; the commissions on the power industry; the commissions on transport and communications; the commissions on

construction and the building materials industry; the commissions on the agro-industrial complex; the commissions on science and technology; the commissions on consumer goods and services to the population; the commissions on housing, utilities and municipal engineering; the commissions on public health and social security; the commissions on public education and culture; the commissions on women's working and living conditions, mother and child care; the commissions on youth affairs; the commissions on nature conservation and the rational use of natural resources.

Each commission has between 31 and 51 members, deputies of the respective chamber. The law rules out membership in the commissions of deputies holding government posts, for instance, those who are members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, of the Supreme Court, etc. Such restrictions are necessary for preventing any executive body from influencing the findings of the commissions.

At present 1,210 deputies of both chambers out of a total of 1,500 are elected members of the Standing Commissions, or over four-fifths of the total number of deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Commissions are formed as a rule at the first session of the Supreme Soviet of every new convocation in each chamber separately. They function throughout its term of office, that is, for a period of five years. In nominating deputies for individual commissions their professions and education are the primary considerations. This ensures the expert examination and solution of problems. Continuity in the work of the commissions and use to the utmost of the accumulated experience also play an important role. That is why, besides new deputies, several "vet-

erans" are usually elected to the commissions who have worked in them in previous convocations.

Take, for instance, the present Standing Commission on Public Health and Social Security of the Soviet of Nationalities. It consists of 31 deputies and is headed by Y. Sokolova.

Among its members are Nina Ayurzanayeva, head doctor of a TB clinic in the Aginsky-Buryat Autonomous Area, Tavarali Ziyoyev, a senior machine operator at the Vakhsh Nitrogen Fertiliser Works in Tajikistan, Eteri Kemertelidze, head of the institute of pharmacology of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR, Nikolai Polozov, chairman of the Byelorussian Republican Council of Trade Unions, Omurbek Tashiyev, senior veterinary surgeon at the Pervoye Maya (May Day) collective farm in Kirghizia, Yevgeni Chazov, Deputy Minister of Health of the USSR, and others. Six of them were members of this commission in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of the previous convocation.

All matters are decided at the meetings of the commissions by vote. Members disagreeing with the views of the majority have the right to defend their own proposals either at the session or in the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Of course, the commissions are accountable to the chambers that elected them.

All commissions have equal rights and each carries out its tasks independently. However, the matters they examine are often closely interrelated. So, in actual fact the commissions cooperate with one another. For instance, they jointly work on matters that come within the terms of reference of one or several commissions in both chambers.

What real powers do the commissions have with regard to the executive bodies? First of all, a standing

commission preparing drafts and recommendations has the right to summon any minister or any other government official or any leading officials of republican bodies and ask for an explanation on any matter of interest to it.

Second, the commissions have the right to ask any government or public body and their officials to submit to them the necessary papers, findings, reports and other material related to the matters under consideration by them. As often as not, having received such material, members of the commissions and specialists from their working groups go to the localities to get a first-hand look at the state of affairs in republican and local bodies, at factories and organisations.

And, finally, the commissions' recommendations are carefully considered by the ministries and other government departments concerned. And they must report to the commissions within two months on what measures they have taken as a result.

In case of need the commissions of the Supreme Soviet invite for consultations officials from central and local government bodies, economic experts, scientists and prominent cultural figures and representatives of public organisations. The sittings of the commissions are usually open and their work is widely reported in the media.

Let us take as an example the joint sitting of the Standing Commissions of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities on Construction and the Building Materials Industry held in August 1985. It discussed the results achieved so far by the Ministry of the Building Materials Industry in carrying out plans to introduce new machines and progressive technology into this sector. The Minister of the Building Materials Industry, S. Voyenushkin, was summoned to make a progress report.

First, a few words about the industry itself. It consists of twenty independent branches producing brick, cement, glass and other materials and employing hundreds of thousands of workers. The range of its products is very wide—from metal goods to prefabricated reinforced concrete. The ministry's factories account for 93 per cent of the country's output of cement, 95 per cent of corrugated asbestos boards and sheet-metal roofing, 75 per cent of ceramic tiles, and more than half of all brick and other wall materials.

But, as was pointed out at the sitting, the needs of the construction sites were not yet fully met, especially in finishing, facing, heat-insulation, and roofing materials. The industry's basic assets were aging. Progressive machinery and technology, the latest in equipment and means of automation were being introduced at a slow pace. In many cases the new technologies developed by the industry's research institutes were being used at one or two enterprises only.

In his report the Minister mentioned the reasons for the industry's poor performance only in passing, concentrating on plans for the future instead. However, the deputies were not misled by the fascinating prospects. Their consensus was that the ministry had not done enough to speed up scientific and technological progress and thus had failed to meet modern requirements.

On instructions from the commissions the deputy Alexander Sukhanov, a building team leader at the Moscow underground railway, had looked into the state of affairs at an asbestos and cement integrated works in the town of Voskresensk, near Moscow.

"Workers of the factory," he said at the meeting, "have mastered the production of extrusion panels.

These are of a very good quality. But the plant is working by fits and starts. The production lines are not running at full capacity because they are not properly adjusted. The share of manual labour is large in many sectors."

The next speaker was Tatyana Makarova, a house-painter from a construction organisation engaged in finishing operations in the city of Tula. She expressed concern over the fact that only a small part of finishing operations were done by industrial methods. The reason was a shortage of materials. Meanwhile, a polymer building materials works in Leningrad had the latest equipment for the manufacture of linoleum, yet only 23 per cent of its capacities were used. Large quantities of equipment had been stockpiled at the warehouses of the ministry, but it was not clear when the equipment would be installed.

The ministry's style of work came under strong criticism. The ministry was said to have failed to establish strict control over the execution of its own decisions, and as a result many of them had remained on paper.

The deputy Leopoldas Petravičius, manager of a cement and corrugated asbestos board works in Akmene, Lithuania, proposed that in order to establish closer ties between the ministry's research institutes and industrial enterprises they should be merged to form a joint research-industrial amalgamation. His proposal was backed by many deputies.

The opinion of the standing commissions on ways of solving the industry's problems was set forth in recommendations to the Ministry of the Building Materials Industry of the USSR. Corresponding recommendations were also sent to other government



departments, in particular, those in charge of the supply of equipment and speeding up the construction of various facilities.

The meetings of all standing commissions are held in a spirit of businesslike criticism. During the five-year term of office of the Supreme Soviet of the tenth convocation they met 270 times to consider nearly 370 matters pertaining to the country's political, economic, social, and cultural development.

Here are some of the subjects considered by the standing commissions over a period of 18 months—from April 1984 to October 1985: the training of foreign specialists and skilled workers in the USSR (the Foreign Affairs Commissions of both chambers); measures taken by the Ministry of the Automobile Industry of the USSR in keeping with legislation on the protection of socialist property (the Commissions on Legislative Proposals); fulfillment of government assignments by the iron-and-steel and chemical industries to develop and introduce low-waste and waste-free technologies in processing mineral raw materials (the Commissions on Industry); measures taken by the Ministry of the Power Industry to ensure the efficient use of power generating facilities and save energy resources (the Commissions on the Power Industry and on Science and Technology); fulfillment of government assignments to develop passenger motor transport and improve services to the population in the Tajik SSR (the Commissions on Transport and Communications); the work of the Soviets of People's Deputies in the Dnepropetrovsk Region in drawing up and carrying out plans for the construction of houses, utilities, leisure and everyday services facilities in rural areas (the Commissions on Housing, Utilities and Municipal Engineering and the Commissions on Construction and the Building

Materials Industry); the work carried out in the Turkmen SSR in conformity with the legislation on mother and child care (the Commissions on Women's Working and Living Conditions, Mother and Child Care); and the work of the Soviets of People's Deputies of the Karelian Autonomous Republic in the field of environmental protection (the Commissions on the Nature Conservation and the Rational Use of Natural Resources).

Members of the standing commissions also take an active part in the preliminary study and discussion of draft annual and five-year plans of the country's economic and social development. The joint preparatory commissions formed every year for such purposes consist of more than half of the deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. With the help of specialists in various sectors of the economy, they make a thorough study of the materials submitted by the government, determine the extent to which various parameters of the plans are substantiated and make amendments.

For instance, 28 standing commissions of both chambers consisting of more than a thousand deputies took part in the preliminary study of the State Plan for the Economic and Social Development of the USSR and the State Budget of the USSR for 1986. At the meetings held to coordinate the work of 17 joint preparatory commissions they heard and discussed over 200 reports by ministries and other government departments and the Councils of Ministers of the Union Republics. All that helped to identify unused potentialities and possibilities, to make the plan and budget more balanced, and to create more favourable conditions for fulfilling the 1986 targets.

## **What Are a Deputy's Duties to His Constituents**

Much has already been said about the work of the deputies to the Supreme Soviet. Let us now consider the rights and powers they have while taking part in the work of the highest body of state authority.

To begin with, every deputy has the right and the opportunity to submit any questions to the Supreme Soviet for consideration and to take part in their discussion and drafting decisions on them.

Every deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR has the right to initiate legislation.

All proposals and critical remarks made by deputies concerning the work of various ministries and other government departments, offices and organisations are considered either by the Supreme Soviet itself or, on its instructions, by the appropriate government bodies and officials. The Presidium may also send individual proposals and remarks made by deputies in the course of discussions of various issues at the session to the USSR Council of Ministers. This has become an established practice.

The ministries, departments and other state bodies instructed by the USSR Council of Ministers to consider those proposals and remarks are obliged to do so within a short time and to report the results to the deputies who put forward these proposals, to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and to the Council of Ministers of the USSR.

One of the important rights enjoyed by the deputy in supervising the work of government bodies is the right to make inquiries. An inquiry may be made at a Supreme Soviet session by one deputy or a group of deputies orally or in written form. The Council of Ministers of the USSR, and the minister or the head

of any other government body to whom an inquiry is addressed are obliged to give an oral or written reply in the corresponding chamber within three days.

A deputy also has a number of other rights connected with the supervisory functions of the Supreme Soviet. For instance, he has the right to suggest that the Supreme Soviet hear a report by any government body or official at the session, and to raise the question of checking on the work of any government bodies, enterprises, offices and organisations. On instructions from the chambers, the Presidium or standing commissions a deputy may check on the work of those bodies and make proposals on improving their work, eliminating shortcomings and bringing to account persons who violate state discipline and legality.

However, the most strenuous part of a deputy's work, which takes a good deal of his time, is the work he carries out in his own electoral district. This work is done every day and there are many aspects to it. The Law on the Status of Deputies says: "The active work of the deputies in their constituencies is an indispensable condition for the efficiency of the Soviet, for strengthening its ties with the population." Constantly keeping in touch with his constituents, the deputy informs them about the work of the Supreme Soviet and the progress made in carrying out plans of economic, social and cultural development. He takes part in drafting measures on the enforcement of laws and decisions passed by the Supreme Soviet and its bodies in his electoral district. The deputies analyse public opinion, study the needs and requirements of the population and take steps to satisfy them. In this work they are supported by voluntary helpers from the local Soviets, public organisations and factory and office work collectives.

The work of a deputy in his constituency is in

many ways determined by rules worked out on the basis of long-standing practice. But its most important aspects are regulated by legislation. For instance, under the USSR Constitution a deputy is obliged to report on his work and that of the Soviet of which a deputy is a member to his constituents. Such reports should be made regularly—for instance, a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR is obliged to report to his constituents at least once a year. In practice, however, most deputies report to their constituents much more often—after each session of the Supreme Soviet.

A report usually includes detailed information about the work of the Supreme Soviet, its Presidium and the standing commissions of the chambers, about the laws and decisions adopted by the highest body of state authority as well as about the work of the deputy himself in the Supreme Soviet and in his constituency. As a rule, the matters discussed concern the prospects of development of the district or city economy, industrial and agricultural production and social and cultural life in the constituency.

A deputy also receives his constituents, considers their proposals, requests and complaints and helps them solve various problems. This is an important part of the deputy's work in his constituency. It often happens that an analysis of what appears to be private complaints or remarks helps a deputy to understand and solve a problem that concerns everybody.

A case in point is the story told by the deputy Galina Petrukhina, a machine operator at the Nizhne-Kuranakh goldfields in Yakutia, an Autonomous Republic in the North of Siberia.

"At the beginning," she said, "my constituents most often turned to me with problems concerning

their everyday lives. For instance, they asked me to help them place a child in a kindergarten, to get a flat, and so on. Of course, I did my best to help them, but then I began to wonder why they should turn to a deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet with such requests. Why can't the local authorities handle such problems? I made a study of the situation and this is what I discovered. Ours is a land with a booming mining industry. But its climate is rigorous, and earlier mostly single men came to work here. Nowadays, with the expansion of social, leisure and everyday services facilities, many work opportunities have opened for women too, and whole families began to move to Yakutia. Yet the old approach was preserved. Houses were built with a view to accommodating single men, and there was a shortage of child-care centres."

On Galina Petrukhina's request the local organisations worked out a plan for stepping up the construction of self-contained flats for whole families as well as of various services facilities. The plan required large investments which could only come from the central authorities. Galina Petrukhina went to Moscow to see the Minister of the Non-Ferrous Metals Industry, the Chairman of the State Planning Committee and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. All her proposals were accepted.

The country's laws give a deputy to the Supreme Soviet the right to turn to any government offices, enterprises and organisations for assistance in the discharge of his duties. Leading officials of the latter are personally responsible for the timely consideration and solution of the problems raised by deputies and are obliged to help them. Officials who fail to fulfill these obligations may incur disciplinary punishment and may even be dismissed from their

jobs. Persons preventing a deputy from carrying out his duties as a representative of state authority are brought to account.

A deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR has extensive rights in the matter of checking on what is being done about voters' proposals, applications or complaints which he has forwarded to various competent bodies. A deputy has the right to take part personally in examining them in such bodies.

The deputies keep in close touch with their constituents and always take their views and needs into account. This vividly manifests itself in the deputies' obligation to carry out the electors' mandates. This practice emerged when the first Soviets were set up during the 1905-1907 revolution in Russia. For instance, workers sending their representatives to the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Soviet at that time instructed them to get the employers to agree to an 8-hour working day and guaranteed minimum wages, to abolish fines and to give them freedom of speech, of the press, of association, and other rights.

In the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of the eleventh convocation the deputies received a total of more than 16,000 mandates from the electors. Unlike instructions to the deputies to the local Soviets, those mandates chiefly concerned particularly important problems of the country's social and economic development as well as the social and economic development of individual regions, of raising the efficiency of social production and perfecting the work of government and public bodies.

A little earlier the deputy Gulistan Abdugapparova, a team leader on a state farm in the Republic of Uzbekistan, received a very important mandate from her electors. The land in her constituency runs along the Amu Darya River which often changes its course and washes away the banks. There is even a word in

the Uzbek language to describe the river's erratic behaviour—*deygish*. The word has been known since ancient times, but it was only recently that specialists found a way of averting the calamity. However, the project required large investments which the local authorities could not afford. So the constituents instructed their deputy to bring the matter to the attention of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and to show why the project should be financed from the state budget.

She was also instructed to press for speeding up the industrial development of the Biruni District situated in her constituency, which is now chiefly a farming area. Population growth there has always been high, and local residents do not want their children to go to town in search of work in the future. As cotton-growers, they are interested in improving the quality of cotton-picking machines. Since the area is situated on the edge of a desert, the development of transport also presents a problem. So, the electors formulated all those wishes at their meetings as a mandate for their deputy Abdugapparova.

Deputies are obliged to examine the electors' mandates. In carrying them out he or she usually has the help and support of local and republican bodies of authority and administration. On more important matters a deputy turns directly to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and to the Union and republican ministries and other departments.

A deputy who neglects his duties to the electors and fails to carry out their mandates may be recalled before his term of office expires and be replaced by another, more worthy representative of their interests. Over the past quarter of a century 12 deputies have been recalled from the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. This is not a big number, of course, considering that the Supreme Soviet has 1,500 members and



that its composition has been largely renewed five times over that period. But, first, one should not forget that it is the most deserving people who have proved that they can be relied upon both in their professional and public activities that are elected to the Supreme Soviet, as a rule. And, second, the fact that a deputy may be recalled shows that the population's control over the work of its representatives in the highest body of state authority is far from being a mere formality.

The unimpeded and efficient exercise of the deputies' rights and duties is ensured by a whole system of political, legal and material guarantees. During sessions of the Supreme Soviet and meetings of its Presidium and standing commissions, and for the purpose of carrying out their instructions or his duties in the constituency, a deputy is released from his regular employment while continuing to receive his average earnings. This is a very important guarantee of his rights because a wage or salary is a deputy's main source of income.

Deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR have the right to use the country's railway, motor-vehicle, water and air transport free of charge. The state also makes up for their expenses involved in corresponding with their electors, making official telephone calls, and so on.

Under the Constitution, a deputy to the Supreme Soviet may not be prosecuted or arrested without the sanction of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR or, between its sessions, of its Presidium. Of course, such a situation seldom arises, but legislation on the deputies' rights and duties does envisage even such incidents which are highly unlikely in Soviet conditions. The important thing is that nothing should prevent a deputy from fulfilling his duties for the good of his constituents.

## **Laws in Furtherance of the Aims of the USSR Constitution**

The past decade has seen a noticeable increase in the law-making activities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. This is connected to a large extent with the coming into force of the country's new Constitution. Naturally, that called for a further improvement of current Soviet legislation since it must specify and reflect everything new set forth in general outline in the recently adopted Fundamental Law. Besides, it was necessary to bring all previously adopted legislative acts into line with the new constitutional provisions.

So, in December 1977, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet adopted a decision on making legislation conform to the new constitutional norms. A list of the new laws to be drafted in the next few years was also made public at that time.

This programme has now been completed—the Supreme Soviet of the USSR has adopted more than 20 major all-Union laws. They can be roughly divided into two groups: laws determining the status of government bodies and further developing the democratic principles of their activities; and laws determining the status of the USSR citizen, extending and enriching his constitutional rights and freedoms. What is characteristic of these laws is that all of them are directed at further developing democratic principles in the life of society.

For instance, the Law on the Basic Powers of the Territorial and Regional Soviets of People's Deputies and the Soviets of People's Deputies of the Autonomous Regions and the Autonomous Areas gives new rights and opportunities to local government bodies in large administrative territorial units.

Can this law be interpreted as reflecting a tendency to decentralise government and administration in the USSR? A simple "yes" or "no" is impossible here. The Soviet political system has an organisational structure marked by two opposing currents, as it were. On the one hand, there is a steady trend for improving centralised leadership of the life of society. Another trend, however, is for widening the powers and initiative of enterprises, associations and the lower bodies of authority and administration. All that is accompanied by the growing involvement of broad sections of the people in adopting economic and political decisions. What it amounts to is the consistent implementation of democratic centralism widespread in the USSR and expressing the unity of its two principles—raising the efficiency of centralised leadership and greater economic autonomy and responsibility for factories and associations.

Why is there a tendency towards centralisation? In the first place, the interests of the socialist state and its basis, the planned economy, require concentration of efforts and resources so that they can be used most efficiently. Naturally, as the scale of social and economic development grows, the role of centralised management increases. Besides, in the economic sphere, centralisation is necessary for carrying out vital national programmes such as the Food Programme, the Energy Programme, the Programme for the Development of Siberia, as well as for coordinating the development of various sectors and territories and for long- and short-term planning.

But centralisation is only one aspect of Soviet reality. There is another side of it, too. It is stated in the new edition of the CPSU Programme: "Developing the principles of centralised management and planning, the Party, in the fulfillment of strategic tasks, will vigorously carry out measures to enhance

the role of the main production element—associations and enterprises, and consistently follow a line towards broadening their rights and economic autonomy... The role and responsibility of republican and local bodies in managing economic, social and cultural development and in meeting the needs of the working people will grow, and the powers of these bodies will be broadened.”

This second tendency can be seen in the increasing role and powers of the local Soviets. Significantly, already in 1971-1972, even before the new Constitution came into force, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR had adopted three laws considerably expanding the rights of the local Soviets in rural areas, settlements, districts and towns. They were to carry out a number of new functions besides their long-established tasks of managing local industry, schools and medical centres, maintaining public order, and so on. For instance, all services establishments as well as all state housing and part of that belonging to enterprises and departments were placed under their control. They were also given the right of supervision in many spheres of the operation of factories and plants situated in their territory but subordinated to all-Union or republican ministries.

Another step in this direction was a new law widening the powers of the territorial, regional and area Soviets. This law completes the work of renovating the legal foundations of the activities of local government bodies; similar laws on other local government bodies had been adopted earlier. The most important new element it introduces into the activities of the Soviets lies in enhancing their role in territorial economic development.

The most important of the first group of laws—on the greater role of people in running the affairs of society and the state—are undoubtedly the Law on

People's Control in the USSR (which will be described a little later) and the Law on Work Collectives and on Increasing Their Role in the Management of Enterprises, Institutions and Organisations. The latter provides for a further and very substantial expansion of the powers of work collectives of which there are more than 2.5 million in the country.

The significance of this new law is apparent. In the Soviet political system all social relations are based on collectivist principles. Therefore, the production collectives are not only the most important place and form of the application of labour. They also take an active part in planning since in the USSR planning starts "from below", with the drawing up of the plans of factories and plants. Work collectives also play an important role in the country's political affairs as they nominate candidates for government bodies, manage election campaigns, etc.

Finally, every Soviet person starts out in life through a work collective; here he learns the norms of socialist ethics and morality and goes through the school of managing production and the affairs of society and sometimes of the state. And it is in the collective that he develops a feeling of being the country's full-fledged master.

The Law on Work Collectives was the first of its kind adopted in the Soviet Union. Of course, this does not mean that there had been no rules and regulations on the rights and duties of such collectives and their relations with society and the state. They did exist, but they were "scattered" among many different legislative acts. The co-authors of the law—the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions—found it advisable to amend those rules and regulations and put them together in one document covering a whole range of questions concerning work collectives—

from their participation in considering new bills and forming government bodies to assistance in strengthening the family. And the idea was not only to put those norms together but also to supplement them with new ones, considerably expanding the powers of work collectives in the sphere of management.

First of all this means a widening of the powers of work collectives in managing labour process. The range of issues that fall within the sphere of their managing activities has become much broader. One of the fundamentally new principles is that the factory management now has the right to submit draft production plans to government bodies for endorsement only after they have been approved by the work collectives.

Under the new law the management is obliged to report regularly to the work collective on its activities. A meeting of the work collective may announce its disagreement with the management and put forward its own solution to this or another problem and say that it will take part in carrying it out. Control over the activities of the management is also seen in the fact that the opinion of the work collective is always taken into account in appointing the managers of all sections of production.

A large section of the law deals with the controlling powers of the work collectives in the field of distribution. They now have more possibilities than before to check whether the pay received by every worker corresponds to his or her actual effort and to take part in improving the bonus system and in introducing additional incentives for the best workers. These powers are now enshrined in legislation. In the opinion of most Soviet workers they have helped to raise productivity and efficiency.

Another section of the law covers a wide range of issues connected with the participation of work col-

lectives in improving social, leisure, housing, and everyday services facilities for factory workers and office employees. They now have a decisive say when the management plans for the social development of enterprises are considered and when decisions on the construction of houses, child-care centres, and other everyday facilities financed from the factory funds are adopted.

Now a few words about how the law was adopted. In keeping with the existing practice, the bill was submitted by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet for extensive public discussion. The idea was to learn all points of view and to take into account all constructive proposals, comments and suggestions. The discussion went on for more than two months and involved more than 110 million people. They put in a total of nearly 130,000 comments, additions and amendments to the bill. The most important of them were taken into account in drafting the final version. As a result of the discussion, 21 articles out of a total of 23 contained in the bill were changed.

The Law on Work Collectives is a very important legislative act. But it is only one of several acts that have been adopted in keeping with the new Constitution and are aimed at formalising the broader participation of working people in running state and public affairs. For instance, the Law on Elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR extends the rights of the work collectives in choosing and nominating candidates for the highest body of state authority. Another new law deals with the Council of Ministers of the USSR and is chiefly aimed at improving and democratising the management of the country's economy. One of its articles says that working people, through their public organisations, should take part in examining matters to be decided by the Council of Ministers of the USSR.

One of the most important laws in the second group dealing with additional guarantees of human rights is the new Citizenship Law. It formalises the long-established principle of equal citizenship in the USSR. It means that regardless of when a person might have acquired Soviet citizenship or why, once he becomes a citizen of the USSR he enjoys equal rights with the rest of the citizens. In many countries naturalisation depends on the length of residence in the country and a "sufficient" knowledge of its language, geography and history. Soviet law, on the other hand, puts no obstacles for admission to citizenship.

The law also defines the rules for renouncing citizenship. A person must receive permission from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet for this. An application for renouncing citizenship may be turned down if the applicant has obligations to the state (military service, taxes), to the judicial bodies and to other citizens (dependents, debts). In this respect the new Soviet law is similar to corresponding acts in other countries. Such restrictions are also permitted by international documents, in particular, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

As for the forcible deprivation of Soviet citizenship, this is permitted only in exceptional cases. Article 18 of the Law gives this right to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. It can deprive a person of citizenship if he commits actions disgracing the name of citizen of the USSR and damaging the country's prestige or security.

Besides the Citizenship Law, there is also a series of other laws providing for further guarantees of human rights. They define and specify the forms and methods of work of the procurator's offices, the bar, the Supreme Court of the USSR and state arbitration and also their powers. In the light of the new consti-



tutional requirements they define in detail the tasks of the law enforcement agencies in protecting the social, economic, political, and individual rights and freedoms of the Soviet people as well as the interests of society.

Such is, in general outline, the content of the new, more important laws adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in furtherance of the aims of the country's new Constitution. Of course, its law-making activities have not ended at that. At present, for instance, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the commissions of the chambers are finishing drawing up a plan of legislative work for the period ending in the year 2000. Taking part in its preparation are many all-Union and republican government bodies and public organisations and research centres.

## **Control Both "From Above" and "From Below"**

As has already been said, unlike the parliaments of many countries, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR exercises not only legislative functions. It combines them with supervisory functions. For instance, it has the right of supreme control over the observance and execution of legislation. It also has unlimited right in supervising the work of all state bodies, including the government itself, and exercises this right continuously through its sessions, the Presidium, the standing commissions and individual deputies.

However, there also exists a special control body in the Soviet Union. It is formed by the Supreme Soviet, works under its direction and is accountable to it. This body is the People's Control Committee of the USSR.

What is people's control? It is a name given in the USSR to a whole system of public and state control over every sphere of production, trade and the state machinery. It operates on the basis of the Constitution, which describes the expansion of the system of people's control as one of the main directions of the development of Soviet democracy.

Isn't there a contradiction here though? In other words, is the development of democracy compatible with the expansion and, consequently, strengthening of control? Yes, it is. The reason is that no state, either socialist or capitalist, can function normally without organised and effective control. The important question is whose interests this control serves and who exercises it. In other words, it all depends on the forms of social relations prevailing in the given state. As for the Soviet Union, whose state system is based on public ownership of the means of production, two-thirds of its control staff consist of workers and farmers, the absolute majority of them doing this work on a voluntary basis.

Singificantly, on the second day after the 1917 Socialist Revolution Vladimir Lenin, head of the world's first government of workers and peasants, despite a host of pressing problems, found time to draw up a *Draft Regulation on Workers' Control*. Already in those days Lenin considered people's control to be an indispensable and important form of working people's participation in running their own state.

Naturally, the forms and methods of work used by the state control bodies have continued to change in the course of Soviet history. And so has their name: workers' control, workers' and peasants' inspection, Soviet control commissions, and people's control. Yet the basic principles of their work have remained the same—the broad involvement of working people,

publicity and universality of control, its effective and preventive nature.

At present about 10 million people work in people's control bodies. Of this number less than 5 per cent are full-time employees. There are nearly a million and a half people's control groups and posts. They are functioning at practically every factory, office and collective and state farm. Members of such groups and posts are elected for a term of two and a half years at the general meetings of work collectives by open ballot from among the more active and respected people.

This is the part of the people's control system formed by voluntary helpers. Its state-run component is made up of people's control committees formed by the Soviets of People's Deputies. There are now over 4,500 such committees functioning at republican, territorial, regional, city, and district Soviets. Besides a full-time staff, they include representatives of trade unions, the Young Communist League and other public organisations, and the mass media. Furthermore, the people's control committees have sections and commissions dealing with various sectors of the economy, and a department receiving complaints and suggestions. Members of these sections and commissions work on a voluntary basis. The work of the full-time staff of the committees is financed by the state.

The entire system is headed by the People's Control Committee of the USSR formed by the Supreme Soviet for a term of five years. The Chairman of this Committee is a member of the country's government.

In keeping with the law, people's control bodies at enterprises and organisations check on the fulfillment of government plans and assignments, identify reserves in production, and see to the economical use of

manpower, material and monetary resources. They also combat breaches of state discipline and embezzlements of socialist property, and check on the implementation of the adopted decisions at the bodies of state administration.

In 1979 the Supreme Soviet adopted a new Law on People's Control in the USSR to replace the Statute of People's Control Bodies that had been in force since 1968.

What is new in this law? To enable people's controllers to exercise their functions, it gives them much broader rights than before. For instance, controllers now can ask the leading officials of enterprises, organisations, ministries and other government departments to supply them with the necessary material and documentation, make audits and halt the illegal actions of various officials. When a public reprimand proves insufficient, the people's control committees have the right to mete out administrative punishment, to make the law-breakers pay for the inflicted damage, to raise the question of dismissing leading officials from their jobs, and even to send evidence against them to the Procurator's Office.

For their part, the managers of offices and enterprises, the leading officials of ministries and other government departments are obliged to help the people's control bodies in every way, thoroughly study their proposals and recommendations and eliminate shortcomings in their work. Persons guilty of preventing controllers from exercising their functions are brought to account regardless of their posts.

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR, having extended the powers of the people's control bodies through a legislative act, is also giving them continuous practical help. Concrete issues concerning their work are often discussed in the standing commissions of its chambers. In the past five years the Presidium of the

Supreme Soviet of the USSR has twice discussed reports of the People's Control Committee of the USSR on its work and on problems that require solution at the highest level.

Another very important control body in the USSR is the Procurator's Office. It is an integral, centralised countrywide system called upon to exercise supreme power of supervision over the strict and uniform observance of laws by all ministries and government departments, offices, enterprises, and all citizens. This supervision is exercised on behalf of the entire state, and that is why the Procurator-General of the USSR is accountable only to the highest body of state authority—the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Over the past five years the Procurator-General has thrice reported to the Supreme Soviet on the work of the agencies subordinate to him. Following his report to the session held in July 1985 a special resolution adopted on this subject said that one of the main tasks of the Procurator's Office today was to raise the effectiveness of supervision over the strict observance of laws in the economic sphere.

This emphasis on more vigorous action by the Procurator's Office to strengthen legality and order in economic relations may seem strange at first sight. As I have said, this stems in the first place from the specific features of the present stage of development of Soviet society. The Soviet Union is carrying out a series of large-scale measures aimed at accelerating social and economic development through speeding up scientific and technological progress and perfecting the management system and the entire economic organism. And this implies, naturally, a further strengthening of legality and even stricter observance of economic discipline and order at every level.

As was pointed out in the Procurator-General's report, the situation in the country as a whole has

improved in this respect over the past few years. However, the Procurator's Office still has to deal with a considerable number of cases of breaches of state, labour, planning, and contractual discipline, of mismanagement, waste, departmentalism and parochialism, and other deviations from the socialist principles of economic management. For instance, in 1984 alone Procurators brought nearly 230,000 legal actions against leading officials of various enterprises and ministries for the protection of state property worth 265 million roubles.

What are the causes of such violations? Among other things, they are rooted in the stereotypes of thinking of many economic managers which had developed in the years of extensive growth of the country's economy. Unfortunately, this development also gave rise to negative phenomena such as, for instance, the wasteful use of material and financial resources; it led to a situation in which the strict and timely fulfillment of contracts was considered not mandatory and lenience was shown towards violations of labour discipline and low-quality output. Now that the emphasis is on intensive and, consequently, thrifty economic management not all those at the helm of factories and ministries have proved ready for that.

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR has instructed the Procurator's Office to tighten supervision over the observance of laws in economic activities. Procurators are to be more exacting towards the managers of enterprises and organisations so that the latter would strictly abide by the laws on the economical and rational use of material values, on the production of high-quality goods and on the observance of state discipline and order in production as well as labour legislation.

A number of changes have been made in the structure of the Procurator's Office in keeping with the demands of the time. Specifically, agencies of the Procurator's Office have been set up in the transport sector and at enterprises of the agro-industrial complex, and the organisation of procuratorial supervision over environmental protection has been improved.

Press reports show that those measures have the full support of the people. The Soviet people have always welcomed an open and businesslike discussion of urgent problems. They support the line of enhancing exactingness, putting things in order everywhere, and radically improving economic management and the system of supervision. The reason is that the ultimate objective—speeding up the country's social and economic development—meets the interests of every Soviet person.

## **In the Interests of Peace and International Cooperation**

In its foreign-policy activities the Supreme Soviet of the USSR consistently pursues a line of preserving and strengthening peace, curbing the arms race and expanding and deepening cooperation between the Soviet Union and other countries.

The Soviet state has been pursuing such a foreign policy since the first days of its existence. One of its first decrees (laws) was the Decree on Peace signed by Lenin. In it the young Soviet Republic described wars of aggression as the gravest crime against humanity and declared peace the main goal of its foreign policy.

The Soviet Union has been following these prin-

ciples throughout its history. Back in 1951, in response to an appeal from the Second World Congress of the Partisans of Peace, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted a document which has no parallel in world legislation. It was the Law of the USSR on Defence of Peace. In that law war propaganda in any form was condemned as the most heinous crime against humanity.

The continuity of Soviet foreign policy was reaffirmed in the decisions of the 27th Congress of the CPSU. The Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the Congress says: "Socialism unconditionally rejects war as a means of resolving political and economic contradictions and ideological disputes among states. Our ideal is a world without weapons and violence, a world in which each people freely chooses its path of development, its way of life. This is an expression of the humanism of communist ideology, of its moral values. That is why for the future as well the struggle against the nuclear threat, against the arms race, for the preservation and strengthening of universal peace remains the fundamental direction of the Party's activities in the international arena."

These objectives and the very essence of USSR foreign policy were set forth in a most convincing manner by Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, during his meeting with President Reagan in Geneva on November 19-21, 1985.

Reporting on the results of that meeting at the session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on November 27, 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev said: "...central to the talks must be questions that determine our relations and the world situation in general—questions of security. What is more, we took into account political and strategic realities in Europe and



the world, the opinion of our friends and allies..., their persistent calls on the Soviet Union to do everything possible to ensure that the Summit Meeting be held. We understood how many hopes all over the world were pinned on the meeting, and undertook steps to improve the international climate, to make it more favourable for the meeting."

This line pursued by the USSR delegation at the Soviet-American Summit in Geneva was supported by all other deputies who spoke at the Supreme Soviet session. In its resolution on the results of the Soviet-US Summit in Geneva and the international situation the Supreme Soviet of the USSR underlined the following: "The Soviet Union is a firm proponent of a strengthening of trust between all states, of the development between them of equal, mutually advantageous and constructive cooperation regardless of differences in their socio-political systems. The USSR consistently calls for the removal and prevention of the rise of seats of tension, and proceeds from the premise that even the most acute and complex problems can and must be resolved by political means, by way of negotiations."

Major acts in defence of peace were an Appeal of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR *To the Parliaments and Peoples of the World* of June 23, 1981, and an Appeal of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the CPSU Central Committee *To the Parliaments, Governments, Political Parties, and Peoples of the World* of December 22, 1982. On June 16, 1983, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted a resolution instructing the Soviet government to ask the governments of all nuclear powers simultaneously to freeze all their nuclear armaments both quantitatively and qualitatively. In a resolution of December 20, 1983, the Supreme Soviet expressed its grave concern over a sharp aggravation of world tension caused by the

growing militarisation and aggressive drive of the imperialist forces, first of all, the US, and reaffirmed the Soviet Union's unchanging policy of preserving and strengthening peace, curbing the arms race, and expanding and deepening cooperation among states.

The CPSU Central Committee, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Council of Ministers of the USSR issued an address *To the Peoples, Parliaments and Governments of All Countries* on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The address aroused great interest in parliamentary circles and in the international community as a whole. Foreign comments on the address noted that it demonstrated the Soviet Union's readiness for peace, for dialogue, for constructive solutions to all problems concerning the preservation of world peace.

In March 1986, on behalf of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR its Presidium addressed an appeal to the US Congress on a matter of exceptional importance—an immediate end to nuclear weapon tests.

Of special importance were the meetings and talks held during the state visits abroad by members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as well as during the visits of foreign heads of state to the Soviet Union. There have been more than 40 official and unofficial visits by foreign heads of state to the USSR since March 1981. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, for its part, has arranged about 30 official and working visits by its members to other countries. The negotiations held during such visits have led to a signing of a number of inter-state treaties, agreements and other joint documents.

Top-level meetings and talks are the most effective form of solving world problems. They provide opportunities for the sides to better understand one

another's positions on various issues, to resolve conflict situations, to work out the principles for a peaceful world order and to promote bilateral relations. That was confirmed once again during recent visits to the USSR by the heads of state of Nicaragua, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Syria, Libya, Madagascar and Ethiopia.

The visits to France and India by Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, were events of international significance. During his visit to France in October 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev addressed the National Assembly. In his speech he outlined the new Soviet foreign-policy initiatives. The visit laid the foundation for a further improvement of friendly relations between the USSR and France, and helped strengthen European security, expand European cooperation and improve the world climate.

The official and friendly visit of the Soviet leader to India in November 1986 and his talks with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi have elevated the cooperation between the two countries to a new level, both in terms of bilateral and international relations. The Delhi Declaration on the principles of a nuclear-weapon-free and non-violent world signed during the visit is a document that demonstrates a new way of political thinking corresponding to the conditions of the nuclear-space age. The principles and ideas put forward in the Declaration express the interests of the world community and the cherished dreams of all the peoples of the world. They pave the way to mankind's peaceful future.

More than three decades ago (on February 9, 1955) the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted a declaration calling for the establishment of direct contacts among the parliaments of all countries. The

declaration noted that the Supreme Soviet attached exceptional importance to the development of relations among states, both big and small, on principles corresponding to the interests of cooperation among nations in conditions of a peaceful and tranquil life. The declaration underlined the great responsibility of parliaments as bodies endorsing legislative acts on war and peace for preserving and strengthening world peace.

The declaration marked the beginning of direct contacts between the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and parliaments in other countries. These contacts are assuming an ever greater scope with each passing year and are becoming more effective. Joint documents are signed at the end of the numerous visits paid to the USSR by foreign parliamentary delegations as well as of visits to other countries paid by delegations of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Such documents emphasise the common stand of the sides on the burning issues of our time and assess the state of bilateral relations.

Several hundred official parliamentary delegations have visited the Soviet Union in recent years at the invitation of the Supreme Soviet. They came from more than a hundred countries. Soviet delegations also paid visits to countries on all continents.

Significantly, despite the increasing world tension, contacts between the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the parliaments of other countries have been growing steadily. The period between 1981 and 1986 saw the first exchanges of parliamentary delegations between the USSR and Angola, Spain, Iraq, the Cape Verde Islands, the Seychelles, the Philippines and Ecuador. During this period delegations of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR visited for the first time Benin, Madagascar, Mozambique, Peru, Thailand and Togo. After a break of about 30 years, a dele-

gation of the National People's Congress of China visited the USSR.

A delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR led by the present author paid a return visit to the People's Republic of China in October 1985. We had numerous meetings and discussions with our Chinese counterparts. Our visits to Peking, Guangzhou and Hangzhou made a particular impression on us. Wherever we went in that vast country we underlined the Soviet Union's consistent policy of seeking to improve relations with the People's Republic of China. Both sides noted with satisfaction that some headway had been made of late in the development of Soviet-Chinese ties in the trade, economic, scientific, technological, and cultural spheres. Political contacts between the two countries had also expanded.

Interparliamentary exchange provides an important channel for such contacts. It can undoubtedly help to normalise relations and bring about better understanding between the USSR and the People's Republic of China. The people we talked to invariably expressed their satisfaction with the recent development of Soviet-Chinese relations and welcomed the resumption of parliamentary ties. They noted that despite certain differences between the bodies of state authority in the USSR and the People's Republic of China, in terms of their legal status and functions, there were also quite a few similarities between them. The Chinese side showed keen interest in various aspects of the work of the top and local bodies of state authority in the USSR and underlined the importance of the Soviet experience for their practical work. Among other things, they were interested in the activities of the standing commissions of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the functions of the local Soviets of People's Deputies.

In discussing the tasks of the top government bodies in both countries, the sides invariably underlined their contribution to creating a durable peace, to averting the threat of nuclear war and to preventing the militarisation of outer space.

The exchange of visits between the parliaments of the two countries has benefited both sides. It is to be hoped that the contacts will not only continue but also become more profound and meaningful and play a constructive role in further normalising Soviet-Chinese relations, in promoting better understanding and in strengthening friendship between the peoples of the two countries.

In the new edition of its Programme the Communist Party of the Soviet Union proclaims a policy of strengthening inter-state relations between the USSR and the other socialist countries, including the development of contacts between their legislative bodies. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR, guided by this principle, pays special attention in its foreign-policy activities to the development of ties and the exchange of experience with the highest bodies of state authority in other socialist countries. Fraternal cooperation between the parliamentarians of these countries promotes joint efforts in solving the problems of building socialism and communism and in working for peace and disarmament. The exchange of delegations enables the sides to become better acquainted with the work of the legislative bodies of one another, to exchange experience and to formulate a coordinated policy in the international arena. For instance, at one of their meetings parliamentarians from the fraternal countries appealed to the parliaments of the world and to world public opinion to speak out against interference by the USA and several other Western countries in Poland's internal affairs, against the attempts to prevent Poland from

resolving the crisis independently, and not to allow the events in that country to be used for stepping up East-West confrontation, for undermining détente and peaceful cooperation among states.

Such regular meetings by the parliamentary groups of the socialist countries have become a good tradition, as it were. They make it possible to exchange experience and information and to work out a coordinated policy.

The latest meeting of this kind was held in Berlin on February 20-21, 1985. During the consultations the speakers underlined the importance of the Soviet Union's peace initiatives for preventing nuclear war and for nuclear disarmament. These included proposals on a commitment to be undertaken by all nuclear powers not to be the first to use nuclear weapons, on a nuclear freeze and on a general and complete ban on nuclear weapon tests.

The speakers pointed out that in view of the complex world situation the parliaments and every parliamentarian had a special responsibility in the struggle for peace, disarmament and universal security. It was emphasised that the parliamentarians of the socialist countries should take an active, militant stand on those issues.

Representatives from the parliaments of the Warsaw Treaty countries met in Budapest on May 14, 1985, to mark the 30th anniversary of the Treaty. Its participants underscored that over the past three decades the Warsaw Treaty had reliably protected the historic socialist gains, promoted all-round cooperation among the allied countries and played a leading role in preserving and strengthening peace in Europe and in the world as a whole. The parliaments of the fraternal countries are making an important contribution to furthering cooperation among the Warsaw Treaty countries in the struggle to reduce

world tension and promote peaceful cooperation. They have more than once appealed to the parliaments and peoples of the world to help end the arms race, first of all, the nuclear arms race, eliminate the dangerous confrontation and revive détente. The meeting expressed confidence that the parliaments and parliamentarians of all countries could make a notable contribution to the struggle to avert the threat of world nuclear war, to develop constructive dialogue and cooperation, and to create an atmosphere of trust and improve the world climate. This is particularly important today when the forces engaged in an arms buildup and preparing to place weapons in outer space are becoming more and more active in the world. They are pursuing a policy of military threats and revenge and seeking a revision of the postwar territorial and political realities in Europe. Parliamentarians from the Warsaw Treaty countries meeting in Budapest appealed to the parliaments and their opposite numbers in Europe and other continents to rise above their differences, to become partners in the struggle against the threat of nuclear annihilation and to develop broad international cooperation and thus help ensure universal peace and security.

The exchange of delegations among the parliaments of the fraternal countries also helps carry out those wide-ranging tasks. Such exchange is becoming more and more intensive and fruitful. Here are some examples.

A delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR went to Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea in November 1984. It was headed by Vladimir Dolgikh, Alternate Member of the Political Bureau of the CPSU Central Committee, Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. The delegation had talks in Hanoi held in an atmosphere of fraternal solidarity and complete



unanimity of views. The two sides discussed questions relating to the further development of Soviet-Vietnamese relations, and closer cooperation between the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as well as world problems of mutual interest. The Soviet and Vietnamese parliaments were unanimous in emphasising that at a time when the forces of imperialism and world reaction were trying to weaken the unity of the socialist countries in various ways their cohesion and mutual support assumed particular importance.

In Laos there was a comradely exchange of views on questions relating to the foreign policy of the two fraternal countries, bilateral relations and the present-day world situation. Parliamentarians of both countries expressed deep satisfaction with the results of the official visit of friendship paid to the Lao People's Democratic Republic by the delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. They said that the visit was yet another important contribution to further developing and deepening the relations of friendship and fraternal cooperation between the Soviet Union and Laos.

The exchange of views between the parliamentarians from the Soviet Union and their opposite numbers in Kampuchea was also productive. It showed a mutual desire to strengthen cooperation between the two countries and peoples in the interests of promoting peace in that part of the world and in the world as a whole.

A delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR went to Hungary in September 1985. It was headed by Viktor Nikonov, Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. Relations between the Soviet Union and Hungary are developing successfully. They are marked by complete mutual understanding and pro-

found trust as well as a sincere interest in each other's achievements and mutual support. We can say with confidence that our cooperation has a reliable basis and good prospects. The visit has also helped further to strengthen these fraternal ties.

Another delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR paid an official visit to the German Democratic Republic in September 1985. It was led by Lev Zaikov, Member of the Political Bureau of the CPSU Central Committee, Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. The relations of fraternal friendship and all-round cooperation between the USSR and the German Democratic Republic continue to develop, and so do the close contacts and ties between the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the People's Chamber (Volkshammer) of the German Democratic Republic. Undoubtedly, the new meeting between the parliamentarians of both countries has helped further to strengthen fraternal ties between the German Democratic Republic and the USSR.

Links with parliaments in the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America occupy an important place in the foreign-policy activities of the Supreme Soviet. Contacts with them have assumed a wide scope. Twenty-nine parliamentary delegations from developing countries visited the Soviet Union between March 1981 and March 1985. Thirty-three delegations of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR visited those countries in the same period. The exchange became much more active in 1985-1986. The USSR played host to delegations from the parliaments of Indonesia, the Philippines and Tunisia, while Soviet delegations visited Algeria, Kuwait, Argentina and other countries.

Delegations of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR visited Algeria, Jordan, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia in

connection with the Israeli aggression against Lebanon. The purpose was to set forth the Soviet Union's principled stand on a Middle East settlement. The visits were a vivid manifestation of the Soviet Union's support for the just Arab cause, and people in Arab countries regarded them as extremely important. The Soviet Union's consistent Middle East policy and its practical steps aimed at curbing aggression were highly appreciated. It was underlined that the trips of Soviet parliamentarians to Arab countries at such a critical moment for all Arab nations were a great help in mobilising Arabs for the fight against the Israeli aggressor.

At the invitation of Mexico's National Congress, a delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR paid an official visit to Mexico to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The delegation was led by Ivan Kapitonov, Chairman of the Central Auditing Commission of the CPSU. Both sides emphasised that Soviet-Mexican relations were based on respect for the generally accepted standards of international law. They served as a good example of peaceful coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation between countries with different social systems and contributed to stabilising the world situation.

The official visit to Great Britain paid by a delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR headed by Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1984 was a landmark in interparliamentary ties. The Soviet delegation had a frank exchange of views with British parliamentarians and members of the British government on overcoming the present dangerous trend in world affairs and discussed bilateral relations.

The delegation had a meeting in the Palace of Westminster with members of the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Speaker of

the House of Lords Lord Hailsham who is Lord High Chancellor. The head of the Soviet delegation noted at that meeting that the Soviet Union did not encroach upon the security of any country, East or West. "We want to live in peace with all countries," he said, "to translate into life the principles of peaceful coexistence between states with different socio-political systems. The USSR's highest legislative body expressed its readiness to contribute effectively, together with the parliaments of other countries, to settling the most pressing problem of the day—saving mankind from nuclear catastrophe."

The Soviet delegation had a very crowded schedule. It included meetings with British members of parliament, detailed negotiations with the British Prime Minister Mrs Margaret Thatcher and a frank discussion with representatives of the business community. At all those meetings the Soviet delegation formulated the USSR's consistent peace policy in the most clear-cut terms.

The Soviet representatives underlined that their country stood for improving inter-state relations and that there was always room for reasonable compromise in politics and diplomacy, that there was a wide field for developing and strengthening mutual understanding and confidence on the basis of close or identical interests. And the Soviet Union and Great Britain, the Soviet and British peoples did have identical interests. The most important of them was to preserve peace. The delegation stated the Soviet Union's readiness actively to promote Soviet-British relations in many spheres and expressed the hope that the British side would adopt a similar stand.

A delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR visited the USA in March 1985 at the invitation of the US House of Representatives. The delegation was led by Vladimir Shcherbitsky, Member of the Polit-

ical Bureau of the CPSU Central Committee. At its first meetings with the hosts the Soviet delegation underlined that in view of the present-day international tension the law-makers of the two countries bore considerable responsibility for the destiny of peace and should use every opportunity to avert the military danger and save civilisation from destruction. No one had the moral right to keep aloof from solving this central problem of our time. The Supreme Soviet believes, said the head of the Soviet delegation, that positive changes in Soviet-US relations, and, what would be even better, their complete normalisation are not only important for bilateral relations but would have a beneficial effect on the world climate. The USSR stands for expanding contacts and cooperation with the USA in various fields, in particular, in trade, the economy, science, culture, and so on.

The Soviet and American parliamentarians discussed the key problems of our time: preventing the militarisation of outer space, and limiting and ending the arms race. The results of the discussions with American law-makers were satisfactory on the whole. It was far from every point on which the parties to the talks agreed. But the main result of the meeting was that they reached a common conclusion that the parliamentarians of the USSR and the USA bore a great responsibility for preserving world peace and curbing the arms race.

A delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR paid an official visit to Japan in October 1984. In the course of the discussions both sides expressed satisfaction with the resumption of Soviet-Japanese parliamentary contacts. They underlined the role and responsibility of the parliaments of the two countries for ensuring peace and for improving and developing relations between the USSR and Japan. The meetings

and discussions were held in a businesslike atmosphere and touched upon various issues of Soviet-Japanese relations as well as some of the urgent world problems. Both sides expressed an interest in developing the Soviet-Japanese dialogue with the aim of promoting mutual understanding, helping to create more prospects for bilateral relations and improving the world climate.

The Soviet and Japanese MPs pointed out that contacts between them may help put right Soviet-Japanese relations. Their present state cannot satisfy the needs of the exchange that should exist between neighbouring countries. This concerns every sphere of contacts, be it political, trade, economic, scientific, or cultural. The Soviet Union stands for taking Soviet-Japanese relations out of their present state and setting them in motion.

In April 1985, a delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, headed by Mikhail Zimyanin, Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, paid a visit to the Federal Republic of Germany. The visit was part of a series of contacts maintained by the two countries on the basis of the Moscow Treaty signed on August 12, 1970. In its discussions with political figures in the Federal Republic of Germany the Soviet delegation underlined the USSR's belief that the potential of cooperation and trust between the two countries should be safeguarded. It was necessary to help the peoples of the two countries to draw closer together along a path of mutual understanding and goodneighbourliness. That is why, it was pointed out, the visit of the Soviet parliamentary delegation is at the same time a goodwill mission to the entire people of the Federal Republic of Germany.

On December 4, 1985, the chairmen of the two chambers and other members of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR received a delegation of the lower house

(Bundestag) of the FRG Parliament led by Philipp Jenninger. The next day the delegation was received by the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Andrei Gromyko. Bilateral relations and the world situation were discussed.

A delegation of the Parliamentary Group of the USSR led by the present author went to France in January 1986 at the invitation of the French-Soviet Friendship Group in the country's Senate. We met the President of the Senate Alain Poher, President of the National Assembly Louis Mermaz and other members of the French Parliament. The discussions focussed on strengthening peace and developing Soviet-French relations.

A Soviet parliamentary delegation headed by Salamat Mukashev, Vice-Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, went to Sierra Leone in January 1986 to attend the inauguration of President Joseph S. Momoh. He was presented with a message of congratulations from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

A delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR visited India at the invitation of its Parliament on the occasion of the 36th anniversary of the Republic.

A visit to Tunisia was paid by a delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in April 1986.

At a joint meeting of members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Soviet delegation the two sides considered the state of parliamentary ties between the USSR and Tunisia and expressed a desire for their further development and for expanding bilateral co-operation in various spheres. As head of the Soviet delegation, I spoke of the 27th Congress of the CPSU. I pointed out that the Soviet Party forum had reaffirmed the policy of preserving and strengthening peace pursued by the CPSU. That was the aim of the Soviet Statement of January 15, 1986, which outlined

a programme for gradually freeing the world of nuclear weapons by the end of this century.

In his statement the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Mahmoud Messadi expressed satisfaction with the state of Soviet-Tunisian cooperation. Its development had been furthered, in particular, by the exchange of visits between Soviet and Tunisian statesmen and political figures, including a visit to Moscow by a Tunisian parliamentary delegation, and the presence of a delegation of the Socialist Destour Party at the 27th Congress of the CPSU.

Tunisia, M. Messadi emphasised, highly appreciates the stand of the Soviet Union which has consistently supported the Arab countries and the just cause of the Palestinian people.

The friendly discussion with President Habib Bourguiba of the Republic of Tunisia centred on questions of Soviet-Tunisian relations and their further development in various spheres in the interest of the peoples of the two countries.

The Soviet delegation visited the State Engineering School, which was built with Soviet assistance. The delegation also toured the country visiting the cities of Sousse and Monastir, centres of Tunisian light industry and crafts and well known for their monuments of Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine and Arab culture, and Bizerte, the citadel of the Tunisians' national liberation struggle.

The Soviet parliamentarians met the governors of those provinces, the managers of state-owned enterprises and discussed prospects for the development of Soviet-Tunisian cooperation, in particular, between the two twin cities—Dushambe and Monastir.

On February 5, 1986, the Committee of the Parliamentary Group of the USSR had a meeting with US Senator Edward Kennedy who was on a visit to the



Soviet Union. He was received by Chairman of the Soviet of Nationalities August Voss and USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Shevardnadze. The following day Senator Kennedy met Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

In March 1986, a delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR led by Vice-Chairman of the Presidium Pavel Gilashvili paid a visit to Cairo. The delegation was received by Speaker of the Egyptian People's Assembly Rifaat Mahgoub and other Egyptian statesmen and members of parliament. In the course of the discussions the two sides expressed a mutual desire for expanding parliamentary ties and developing cooperation between the USSR and Egypt in various spheres.

The head of the Soviet delegation delivered a message to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The message noted that the development of parliamentary ties between the two countries reflected a general turn for the better in Soviet-Egyptian relations and that it would not only benefit both nations but also help improve the world climate as a whole.

A delegation from the Supreme Soviet of the USSR paid an official visit to Ecuador in March 1986, at the invitation of that country's National Congress. The delegation was led by Vice-Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Jan Vagris. They were received by Vice-President Blanco Peñaerrera Padilla of Ecuador and Speaker of the National Congress A. Bucaram. The delegation also had a meeting with several deputies of the Congress. The two sides expressed deep concern over the arms race, especially in the nuclear sphere. They

called for the strengthening of peace and international cooperation, broadening of contacts between the parliaments of their two countries and exchange of experience and information in the field of law-making.

On March 18, 1986, this delegation led by Jan Vagris was received at the Congress of Venezuela and had a meeting with Vice-President Leonardo Ferrer. The delegation also met the chairmen of various commissions and members of the Congress. On March 19, the delegation was received by the President Jaime Lusinchi of Venezuela and delivered to him a message from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

On March 24, 1986, Andrei Gromyko, Member of the Political Bureau of the CPSU Central Committee, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, received Leonilde Jotti, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies. The meeting took place in the Moscow Kremlin. The discussion concerned the programme put forward by the 27th Congress of the CPSU for setting up an all-embracing system of international security, for large-scale peaceful cooperation on the European continent and for preventing the spread of the arms race to outer space. Both sides stated that they were convinced of the need to improve the world climate and strengthen confidence among countries. They confirmed their readiness to continue the Soviet-Italian dialogue and expand fruitful cooperation between the two countries. Vice-Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Ringaudas-Bronislovas Songaila, Chairman of the Soviet of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR August Voss, Secretary of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Tenghiz Menteshashvili, and other members of the Supreme Soviet took part in the talks.

Leonilde Jotti, who, besides being President of Italy's Chamber of Deputies, is also a leading member of the Italian Communist Party, was received by Mikhail Gorbachev on March 25, 1986. Both sides reaffirmed their mutual desire to continue the Soviet-Italian dialogue with the aim of further promoting good relations and cooperation between the two countries.

On April 4, 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev received Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives D. Fascell (Democrat) and Republican Congressman W. Broomfield. The meeting took place in the Moscow Kremlin. The American Congressmen had been invited by the Standing Commissions on Foreign Affairs of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The two sides expressed their common desire to promote Soviet-US contacts in various spheres and stressed the need to continue the top-level dialogue started in Geneva. However, it was noted, this dialogue must be productive and envisage concrete steps towards ending the arms race and removing the threat of nuclear catastrophe.

The Parliamentary Group of the USSR also makes a notable contribution to strengthening peace. In keeping with what has become a kind of tradition, the group embraces all the deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. But unlike the Supreme Soviet, which is the country's highest body of state authority, the group is a public organisation set up not by an act of the Supreme Soviet but by the deputies themselves and functioning on the basis of its Statute adopted by a general meeting of its members.

The group is developing broad ties with members of parliament in other countries. Members of the Parliamentary Group have visited many countries

and have had useful discussions with their members of parliament.

Parliamentarians from many countries come to the Soviet Union at the invitation of its Parliamentary Group. The latter maintains particularly close ties with their colleagues in the other socialist countries.

The group also keeps in touch with foreign parliamentarians through its sections, of which there are fourteen at present: Soviet-Austrian, Soviet-British, Soviet-Arab, Soviet-African, Soviet-Belgian, Soviet-Greek, Soviet-Italian, Soviet-Latin American, Soviet-Turkish, Soviet-French, Soviet-Japanese and Soviet-Cyprus sections, a section on parliamentary ties with the Federal Republic of Germany, and a section on questions of peace and disarmament.

The group is very active in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) which it joined in 1955. Set up back in 1889 the union currently comprises 104 national parliamentary groups. Its aims are to promote personal contacts between members of all parliaments and unite them for carrying out joint actions to secure and maintain the participation of their respective states in establishing and developing representative institutions and in advancing the cause of international peace and cooperation.

The Parliamentary Group of the USSR has proposed that the Inter-Parliamentary Union consider such pressing world issues as détente, disarmament, the elimination of the vestiges of colonialism, international economic cooperation, environmental protection, etc. Delegations of the USSR Parliamentary Group have consistently supported the people's just struggle for national independence and self-determination, in particular, that of the peoples in Palestine and Namibia, and strongly condemned the actions of the Israeli military and the racist regime in South Africa.

All those urgent problems have been submitted for consideration by the IPU regular conferences. Seventy-five such conferences have been held so far. Their agendas consist of many different items, but the IPU is giving more and more attention to such issues as curbing the arms race, bringing about disarmament, including the nuclear and chemical disarmament, and preventing the militarisation of outer space. It was these subjects that dominated the work of the latest conferences, the 73rd one in Lomé (Togo), the 74th one in Ottawa (Canada) and the 75th one in Mexico City.

In Lomé the discussion was focussed on the Soviet proposals aimed at reducing world tension, preventing nuclear war and ending the arms race, first of all, the nuclear arms race, on Earth and preventing its spread to outer space. The debates over these issues were particularly heated at the conferences in Ottawa and Mexico City (April 1986). The absolute majority of the delegations expressed their concern over the current world situation and called for measures aimed at curbing the arms race and preventing nuclear war. That is why so much interest was shown by the participants in the Soviet proposals on removing the threat of nuclear war, preventing the militarisation of outer space, freezing and subsequently reducing nuclear arms, banning nuclear weapon tests, and on not being the first to use such weapons. The Soviet proposal on the peaceful exploration of outer space and on ending all nuclear explosions also aroused keen interest.

European security has always been in the centre of attention of the Parliamentary Group of the USSR. Five inter-parliamentary conferences have been held on this subject on its initiative. The latest took place in Budapest from May 30 to June 4, 1983.

The conference discussed the contribution of the

parliaments of the states that participated in the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe to further promoting universal détente and genuine progress in the field of disarmament.

The discussion reflected the parliamentarians' growing concern over the worsening world situation. Most of the speakers expressed their anxiety over the fact that the projected deployment of new American missiles in Western Europe and the answering measures of which the Soviet Union had warned might lead to a new spiral in the nuclear arms race and sharply increase the war danger.

Soviet parliamentarians explained the position of the USSR on questions of ending the arms race and called attention to the USSR's latest proposals on reducing intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe.

The final resolution called on the parliaments and governments of the European countries, the USA and Canada to take effective steps to end the arms race and to bring about military détente and disarmament. The conference urged the USSR and the USA to make maximum effort at the talks on limiting and reducing nuclear weapons with a view to achieving positive results at the earliest possible date. The resolution also expressed the hope that the Vienna talks on the reduction of armed forces and armaments in Central Europe would come to a successful conclusion and stressed the need to hold a conference as soon as possible on confidence-building measures, security and disarmament in Europe.

The section of the resolution devoted to economic and other problems called for removing all sorts of political and economic barriers in East-West trade and developing large-scale cooperation in the spheres of the economy, science, technology, and environmental protection. It was underlined that the only

way to improve the world economic situation was to end the arms race and to rule out the possibility of armed conflicts.

The resolution also urged continuing cooperation in the humanitarian and other spheres in keeping with the Helsinki Final Act.

At present, said the Soviet representative, we must be not only farsighted and understand the present situation. We must also display political will. We must not allow ourselves to make mistakes when dealing with questions of superarmaments. The very existence of mankind is at stake. We have a great responsibility before the present and future generations. To carry out this responsibility it is necessary to pool the efforts of all people interested in peace, of all who realise that a further whipping up of tension may lead to nuclear-missile catastrophe.

The Parliamentary Group of the USSR takes an active part in the discussion of the pressing problems of our time. A case in point was the 1984 conference on environmental protection held in Nairobi, Kenya. Its agenda included global environmental problems, deforestation, soil degradation, the preservation of species of animals and plants, and environmental protection legislation.

Delegations from the socialist countries convincingly showed that the arms race, first of all, the nuclear arms race, posed a grave threat to the environment.

The Soviet representative pointed out that the arms race was diverting huge material and manpower resources from creative purposes, in particular, from environmental protection. He noted that in the event of a nuclear war there would inevitably be considerable changes in the world climate and in the ozone layer of the atmosphere as well as in other large

ecological systems the consequences of which would be catastrophic.

Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, said in the Political Report of the Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress: "As we see it, the main trend of struggle in contemporary conditions consists in creating worthy, truly human material and spiritual conditions of life for all nations, ensuring that our planet should be habitable, and in cultivating a caring attitude towards its riches, especially, to man himself—the greatest treasure, and all his potentials. And here we invite the capitalist system to compete with us under the conditions of a durable peace."

This firm resolve to defend peace imbues the entire activity of the Supreme Soviet and the Parliamentary Group of the USSR. It is also at the heart of the resolutions adopted by the 27th Congress of the CPSU. Our clear-cut foreign-policy line reflects the aspirations of hundreds of millions of people on all continents and meets with their understanding and support. The duty of every deputy, of every citizen of the Soviet Union, is to do everything so that mankind should never again experience the horrors of war, so that a lasting peace and reliable security should become indispensable elements of human existence, just like the sun and the air.



